

CHOICE

POOL FENCES

Help save children's lives

ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

The best products from
the past year



In-line skates



Notebook computers



Cordless telephones



CHOICE

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Our findings cannot be applied to models other than those included in reports. We do not necessarily test every product available in any particular class of goods. Because the quality of goods can vary or be varied, test results are not infallible. We put a lot of effort into double-checking and getting the facts and test results right. If a mistake slips through, we publish a correction as soon as possible. However, information also dates. If this issue is no longer current when you want to use its advice, call our Information Service to check whether changes have taken place before buying.

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Editorial

IT PAINS US to admit it, but CHOICE has been a victim of technology this issue. Like most publishers these days, we use desktop publishing to produce the magazine — it's fast, efficient, cost-effective and versatile. Like most computer software, however, it suffers from the fact that the industry never leaves it alone. There are always upgrades, new versions, rewrites, and if you don't keep up with them your future options start to become limited as the version you're working with becomes more and more superseded.

Upgrades and new versions are of course intended to improve the software — but it often happens that when you change something that essentially works well, you break a little bit of it. If it were an obvious bug it would soon be fixed, of course — but if it's one of those insidious software bugs that most people don't come across but are devastating when you do, you're in trouble. Experts listen to you with surprise and don't seem to be able to help.

This is what appears to have happened to us.

What all this is leading to is an apology — for the small size of some of the type in this issue. We changed to a new version of our software, were puzzled by what it did to the typeface we use, sought all kinds of expert opinion to explain — and fix — it, and got nowhere. Magazines have deadlines, and as time ticked on towards this one and still we couldn't fix the bug, our options narrowed. In the end, we decided you'd rather have your magazine on time with smaller type than late with a whole new typeface.

But we know (many of us from personal experience) that for people with less than perfect eyesight, this makes the magazine harder to read. We hope you'll forgive us this month — we'll have the problem fixed one way or another by next issue.

Jane Mackenzie
Editor



Features**6 A pool fence makes good sense**

Pool fences save children's lives — yet very few states in Australia have adequate legislation making it compulsory for all backyard pools to have one. There are even vocal (and powerful) minorities who claim a fence is unnecessary. This article examines all the issues.

14 CHOICE Annual Buying Guide

To help you with Christmas shopping or January sales, we take a look back at the best products from the past year's tests.

28 The Australian Standard — flag of excellence or compromise?

When you see a product carrying the StandardsMark, what do you assume? That it's safe, durable, ergonomically sound, technologically excellent? In fact, since every Standard is different — many don't address safety at all, for example — the StandardsMark tells you very little about the product. This article looks at how Standards are made and how shortcomings are almost inevitably built into them.

Tests**23 In-line skates**

They're the most popular craze since skateboards, and will no doubt be on many Christmas wish lists this year. Before you hand over your \$200 or so, check out this report — it will help you buy a pair that won't have fallen apart by New Year.

33 Notebook computers

They're small, powerful, and five minutes using one is enough to make you say, "I want one!" But which one? Our report checked out seven of this new breed of portable computer.

38 Frozen desserts

Ice cream isn't what it used to be — now you can choose from low and reduced-fat versions, 'ice confections', gelati, tofu desserts, frozen yoghurt and more. Is it really healthier to eat these desserts than 'real' ice cream? And which ones taste the best? Our report answers these questions and more.

42 Cordless phones

Their prices vary as much as their features — some fit in your pocket, some can work like an intercom, some don't even allow you to change the batteries yourself ... so how do you choose? Read this report — we've done the hard work for you.

Departments**4 Choice Cuts**

Unsafe cradles; parcel post costs; ham misunderstanding; new CHOICE winner; duff plug; legionella in potting mix; fiery TV.

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The results of our survey of subscribers' satisfaction with insurance companies' handling of their car insurance claims on the whole gave the companies a good report.

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Munchies around the world.

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More questions to test your nous with interest rates.



Cover photo: Kent Mears

**Next Issue**

Washing machines, kettle barbecues, fruit substitutes for children, indoor air quality, breast cancer treatments, shade materials, hair products, what does 'Australian-made' really mean?

February, March, April

Tests: Water filters, cameras, dishwashers, video recorders, computer printers, CD players, laundry detergents, televisions, flued gas heaters, sewing machines, shampoo vacuum cleaners.

Features: Telecommunications update — what all the changes mean to you, credit cards, what is fuzzy logic?, superannuation guarantee levy, savings plans, insulation, asthma management, animal testing for cosmetics, recycling, car safety, insurance disputes review scheme — is it working?



CHOICE CUTS

Child safety

UNSAFE CRADLES

THE recent death of a three-month-old baby found suffocated in her cradle has raised the possibility that other babies have suffered similar fates.

The coroner investigating the baby's death has been alerted to US reports implicating unstable infants' products in similar deaths.

It's thought the baby suffocated when she got stuck in a face-down position in a corner of the cradle which had tilted so much she couldn't roll free.

As a result of the inquest four cradles were banned in South Australia and some other states until the manufacturers had modified their design. Each cradle tilted too sharply, and the locking pin (which prevents the cradle rocking) needed to be better secured so it couldn't fall out, or be pulled out by an inquisitive sibling.

The four cradles involved were: SIESTA H1321-3, SIESTA Jenny-

Lynn, COLONIAL Rambrook, and the KIDDY COMFORT. All these cradles tilted 10° or more when a 5 kg weight was placed in an off-centre position on the mattress.

Siesta Nursery Products withdrew the cradles it markets under the SIESTA brand, and is making a modified pin available to anyone who bought a SIESTA cradle before the ban.

Because there's no Australian Standard for safe cradles there are possibly others on the market which tilt as much as the ones banned.

Additionally parents are warned there will still be a number of unsafe cradles available on the secondhand market; check before you buy one.

Do not leave a baby unattended in any device which can tilt or topple — including cradles. If a cradle is used it should be tied or locked in a level position unless it is actively being rocked by the carer.



One of the Siesta cradles recently banned in some states following a baby's death — the manufacturer says it has modified the design and is making a modified pin available to current owners.

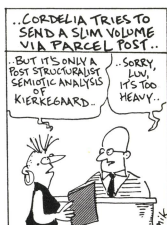
Christmas post

PARCEL POST COSTS

If you're planning to send parcels of Christmas goodies this year, be warned that different rates apply to bulky but light packages. A subscriber wrote to us after she'd been caught unaware posting boxes of well-packed Easter eggs to her grandchildren earlier this year. She was rather shocked to see a tape measure taken to her boxes, and their dimensions taken into account when working out the postage charge. She was even more shocked when the postal charge for three medium-sized cartons came to \$84.

According to Australia Post, the dimensions are only taken into account for large but lightweight parcels. Normally, postage rates for parcels are made up of a basic fee (which varies depending on whether the parcel is to be delivered in the same postal zone it was mailed, or is going to somewhere else in the same state, interstate, or airmail) plus another charge calculated using its weight and the distance it's to be posted.

If your parcel is light but bulky, however, you will be charged its 'deemed' weight — calculated by multiplying the parcel's volume (in cubic metres) by the 'industry density standard' of 250 kg per cubic metre. The deemed weight charge only applies to parcels which weigh more than one kilogram. Weight



is measured in kilograms or part thereof, so if your parcel weighs (or is deemed to weigh) 2.1 kg the charge will be calculated for 3 kg.

These rates were introduced in April last year. According to Rod Preston of Australia Post, the main reason for doing this is that air and train freight charges are based on the amount of air space the goods take up as well as the weight. Australia Post has to pay for this to transport the parcel, so it charges its customers too.

While there seems to be logic behind the charge, we wish Australia Post would publicise it more widely — we think a lot of people working on the old weight-only system are going to have a nasty surprise when they come to post their Christmas parcels.

A PRIVATE CONVERSATION

OUR test report on cellular phones (CHOICE, July 1992) provoked a flurry of letters from offended radio enthusiasts who felt slurred by the comment, "Cellular phones ... are susceptible to eavesdropping from 'ham' radio operators."

It seems a number of licensed amateur radio operators consider the term 'ham' to refer only to amateurs who have passed a

"suite of government-monitored examinations to gain a transmitting licence", to quote one correspondent. So they believed we had pointed the eavesdropping finger at them, the licensed operators. We, however, understand 'ham' to mean any amateur radio operator, licensed or not. So we'd like to point out that we didn't intend any offence to licensed operators.

The Mobilenet Telecom User Guide puts it another way: "Mobilenet is susceptible to eavesdropping on private conversations by the use of commonly available scanning equipment." So quite apart from being divided by a common language, the problem of unwanted listening remains. You still stand warned.



ANOTHER WINNER FROM CHOICE

COLIN PICTON, a schoolteacher from Pelican Flat, NSW, is the winner of the fifth CHOICE Subscriber Draw for new and renewing subscribers. His prize is three products from recent CHOICE tests.

Colin chose a **MIELE** washing machine ("It's something I've always dreamed of, but was always beyond me"), a **MITSUBISHI** fax machine ("I'm involved in a couple of organisations outside work — this will come in handy"), and a **RYOBI** cordless drill ("Someone always borrows your drill and then you lose it — I might keep this one aside!").

Next time could be your turn — all you have to do is subscribe to CHOICE. If you're a subscriber already you're entered for the prize draw automatically when you renew.

Health update

COMPOSTING TO BLAME FOR LEGIONNAIRE'S DISEASE?

COMPOSTING techniques have been blamed by a Queensland department of health study for the numbers of the bacterium *Legionella longbeachae* found in commercial potting mixes.

Two deaths last year in Queensland from this organism, two recorded deaths in SA in 1988 (20 others became ill at the same time) and the onset of illness in others in different states since — all linked with use of potting mix — have prompted calls for detailed investigation, and warnings on bags of potting mix.

Currently, half the cases of Legionnaire's disease in SA and Queensland have been caused by this particular strain of legionella — with increasing numbers of cases being recorded in WA.

Legionella longbeachae is different from that found in the cooling towers of air condition-

ing units. This type of legionella is found in some soils, and in 1990 Adelaide scientists found it in 70% of commercial potting mixes. It is thought people get sick by breathing in the organism while they are watering the garden or potting plants.

One likely scenario is that the bacteria, while perhaps in low numbers when the bag of potting mix leaves the supplier, increase to dangerous levels once the mix becomes bagged in plastic and left outside in the sun. The warmth and moisture encourage the organism to breed. Additionally, the gases inside the bag increase, so when someone leans over the bag and opens it the aerosol effect puffs a potentially deadly dose of the organism into the face of the gardener. (However, the Queensland study has revealed no differences between the level of *longbeachae* in bagged and unbagged potting mixes —

indicating the bacteria had already reached significant levels by the time it left the manufacturer.)

If you need to use commercial potting mix make sure you buy a bag which is not 'bloated'. Open it carefully and gently, and away from your face.

When using it to pot plants, minimise your chances of inhaling any dust from the mix by gently wetting the contents to allow dust-free handling, and water the garden gently so as not to stir up any bacteria. Avoid working in confined places, and wash your hands after handling the mix.

The National Health and Medical Research Council says you needn't go to the extreme of wearing a mask in the garden. Its Public Health Committee says the types of mask available to home gardeners are unlikely to be fine enough to filter out aerosol-sized particles.

Product safety

FIERY TELEVISION

IF you've got a **SAMSUNG** 48 CM COLOUR TELEVISION CB515F or CB515Z you should turn it off and call the company for help. Three of these have caught fire and there is now a major product safety recall.

Much of the press reported that the TVs could "explode", but this was a mistake. The chance of fire, however, is real, due to a faulty solder joint on a printed circuit board.

Approximately 9000 of these TVs were sold across Australia, mostly by early 1990, but you may have acquired an affected unit at a later date than this. What should you do?

■ Check the model number.

■ If it is CB515F or CB515Z, write down the serial number (printed on the rear panel of the set).

■ Telephone Samsung toll-free on 008 803 444, between 8 am and 8 pm (except Saturday).

Samsung will confirm whether your set is affected and, if so, arrange a free in-home service.

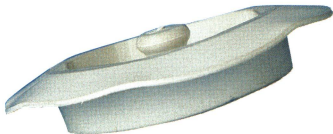
Dollar watch

NEW PLUG CURLS UP AND DIES

WHAT do you expect from a sink plug? It should be easy to grab with begloved fingers and, of course, it should make a good seal in the plug hole. As the rubber perishes it will begin to leak water out of the sink.

Here's a plug which didn't even hold back its first tub of water. Shortly after filling the

sink with hot water our reader noticed the water disappear. The picture shows what happened to the **HOUSEWARE** plug: the edge has wrinkled and doesn't make a seal. It may be a dud, but only costs two dollars, so who is likely to go to the trouble of complaining? Keep your eye out for this one in the shops.



This wrinkly plug didn't even hold its first tub of water in the sink — it's only \$2 down the drain, but annoying nonetheless.

*Domestic swimming pools are dangerous consumer products, especially for toddlers, who are at greatest risk of drowning in a pool.
What should we be doing to make them safer?*

A POOL FENCE MAKES GOOD SENSE



SAFETY HINGES ON THE GATE

AVAILABLE RESEARCH indicates that many toddlers who drown or nearly drown in domestic pools gain access to those pools through faulty or misused pool gates. Gates must be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications and those set out in Australian Standards 1926 (1986) and 2820 (1985).

Poor gate maintenance appears to be a major problem. Fence, hinge and latch manufacturers should supply comprehensive maintenance instructions — request guidelines from the manufacturer if you don't receive any when you purchase the fence. It is imperative that the gate's self-

closing and self-latching mechanisms are in working order at all times.

Gates should never be propped open.

Spring-loaded hinges are used to make the gates self-closing. Common types of latches available are:

■ **Magnetic:** A recent innovation. As the pool gate swings shut, a magnet draws a latch pin across from the housing on the gate into the housing on the fence post, latching it. You have to draw back a release knob positioned high up on the gatepost to pull back the latch pin and open the gate. Magnetic latches are available with an extra key-lock for added security.

Here's a second look at a selection of the year's tried and tested — a nudge in the right direction if Christmas presents or January sales mean it's spending time for you.

ANNUAL BUYING GUIDE

This guide is a quick reference to the products we've recommended throughout the year and an indication of what's still on the market, but it's no substitute for the original reports — if you're considering buying one of the products mentioned, refer back to the full story to see which model would suit you best.

Some of our recommended models have been discontinued since publication, and new untested ones may be on the market, but the ones listed here still offer good value. We'd have liked at least one add-on car steering lock to have made a second appearance — but after our technical staff had outdone the locks so easily, we could not recommend a single model.

KITCHEN

CORDLESS KETTLES (December 1991)

For performance there's not a lot to choose between these kettles — they all take between two minutes 40 seconds and three minutes 15 seconds to boil a litre of water. They have a variety of features — a couple have boil indicators which switch on when the water's boiled; the KAMBROOK KU400 has a 'hold boil' — it will hold the water at boiling temperature for one hour. The biggest difference is in price — they vary between \$30 and \$120. We think you'd be satisfied with any of them — choose according to price and whichever model has the features you want.

WHAT TO BUY (in alphabetical order) Price (\$)

KAMBROOK Flash KU300/KU310	29/69
KAMBROOK Flash KU400	39/89
KENWOOD JK800	60/79
LINDA Super Boil LJ6	39/56
RONSON 8523	49/63
RUSSELL HOBBS 3110	99/120
SUNBEAM KE019	69/89
TEFAL Freeline	90/119



value policies receive a figure based on the car's value at the time it was written off.

The purpose of market-value policies is to give the insured person exactly the right amount of money to buy a car of similar condition at that time. However, a quarter of the people in our survey with market-value policies whose cars were written off

felt the amount they received was too little, compared with 11% of those with agreed-value policies.

People with market-value policies who feel they have been short-changed should challenge the assessment. As one reader wrote in a letter accompanying his questionnaire, "The RACV valued my car at \$6500. I

had purchased the car less than three months earlier for \$7750 ... and I considered the price to be quite reasonable. An independent valuation by the VACC (which I organised at a cost of \$70) recommended a market price of \$7000. This figure was readily accepted by the RACV — no dispute whatsoever." □

THE SURVEY

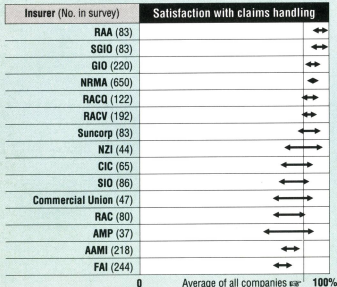
THE SURVEY was sent to all CHOICE subscribers as an insert in the February 1992 issue. Over 4000 people filled in the questionnaire, of whom 2690 had made a claim since January 1987. Many thanks to all those subscribers who took the time to help us.

HOW THE COMPANIES FARED

Satisfaction with claims handling

The respondents were asked: **Which one of the following comes closest to expressing your overall opinion of the handling and settlement of your claim by your insurance company?** — Very satisfied, fairly well satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied.

Eighty six per cent of people who answered this question were either very or fairly satisfied with the handling of their claim. In order to predict the likelihood of your being satisfied with the claims handling of a particular company, we took the results for each and analysed them statistically. This enables us to say, for example, that you have a 92-100% chance of being satisfied with RAA's handling of your claim. The fewer the number of respondents we received for a company, the less confident we can be of the accuracy of this prediction, and so the likelihood of satisfaction becomes less precise. In the figure below this is represented by a longer line — for example **COMMERCIAL UNION** (47 respondents) has a 70-92% likelihood of satisfying you, whereas **NRMA** with 650 respondents can be predicted much more tightly at 89-93%. **RAA** topped the satisfaction stakes, with 96% of respondents happy with the handling of their claim. At the other end of the scale, while three quarters of **FAI** claimants were satisfied, statistically that's a below average result — you're more likely to be satisfied with another company.



Claims paid within 14 days

If a claimant had received a payment from the insurer, the survey asked: **How long after lodging your claim did it take to receive total payment from your insurance company?** — Less than seven days, seven to 14 days, 15 to 30 days, 31 to 45 days, more than 45 days.

Because only about a quarter of respondents had received a direct payment, there were fewer responses (653) to this question, so we could only fairly and confidently report on the six largest insurers in our survey. The average number of claims paid out in less than 14 days was 39%, but the variation between companies was quite dramatic, with 53% of **NRMA** claims paid within the fortnight compared to 16% for **FAI**.

Insurer	Claim paid within 14 days
NRMA	53
AAMI	46
GIO	45
RACV	28
RACQ	22
FAI	16

Choice of repairer

Just over eight out of 10 respondents who had made claims said the claim involved repairs. We asked: **Where was your car repaired?** — At a repairer specified by company, at a repairer recommended by company and approved by me, at a repairer picked out by me and approved by company, other.

The majority of respondents (68%) said they chose the repairer and it was approved by the company. Only 11% of all respondents used a repairer specified by the company, but people insured with **AAMI** (40%), **RACQ** (25%) and **RAC** (21%) had a much greater likelihood of going to a repairer they had not chosen.

Insurer	Chose or approved repairer
NZI	97
RAA	97
GIO	96
NRMA	95
SIO	94
Commercial Union	93
RACV	92
CIC	91
Suncorp	91
FAI	89
SGIO	86
RAC	79
RACQ	75
AAMI	60



DRIVELINES

SATISFIED CUSTOMERS

Satisfaction with the handling of car insurance claims is high, according to our latest survey of subscribers' experiences.

CLAIMS HANDLING has always been a difficult area for us to take into account when we're evaluating the relative merits of insurance companies' policies. The companies are loath to give us statistics, and we don't always hear the good stories. For our car insurance article in February, for example, we asked subscribers to tell us their experiences, and the bad outnumbered the good three to one.

We decided to do a formal survey to find out the true picture, and are pleased to report 86% of the people who responded and had made a claim in the last five years were satisfied with the settlement and handling of the claim. On the whole this is a very good result for the insurance companies, but there is room for improvement in a couple of cases.

WHAT MAKES FOR SATISFACTION?

Two companies achieved a significantly lower proportion of satisfied customers than others. FAI, the company which least satisfied our respondents, was way below the others in the speed of payment stakes; AAMI, in second-last position, gave only 60% of claimants a choice of repairer. Both companies need to lift their game. See *How the companies fared*, opposite, for more details.

In the main, claim satisfaction seems to relate to the nature of the claim and the time taken to receive payment. Most of the claims in our survey (57%) involved minor (still drivable) collisions, and nine out of 10 people with a minor collision claim were satisfied with its handling. By contrast,

only six out of every 10 people reporting a claim for theft of the vehicle were satisfied with their claim's handling. There is clearly room for improvement in this area.

More than 80% of the claims in the survey involved repairs. People who chose their own repairer (and this was the majority) were more likely to be satisfied (91%) with the quality of their repairs than people who used a repairer specified by the insurer (72% satisfied).

One reader tells how he had a car towed to a panelbeater he trusted after an accident, but his insurance company (AAMI) insisted it be repaired at one of its recommended repairers, who had quoted \$2400 for the repairs. His own panelbeater had quoted \$4300.

When he collected the car, "The repair work was terrible. The wiring loom under the bonnet was not replaced, just turned around to hide the damage, the headlights were loose, the front bumper bar was not aligned, the bonnet was still bent, the paint colour didn't match, the clutch cable was burnt, etc, etc."

On the other hand, AAMI does offer a three-year guarantee on its repairs. As another reader wrote, "Complaints to AAMI about the standard of repairer's work brought prompt and satisfactory results. They also rejected and had done again work I had not complained about ... I would rather have this sort of service than try and deal with the repairer direct."

There was a very strong correlation between satisfaction with overall handling of the claim and the time taken to receive payment. Ninety seven per cent of the people who were paid within a fortnight said they were satisfied with the claim. This figure fell to 51% if the payment took longer than a month.

AGREED OR MARKET VALUES

An agreed-value policy is one where the value of the vehicle is decided beforehand by the insurer and the client. People with market-

Fast handling of a car insurance claim made for satisfied customers.



YOUR POOL AND THE LAW

THE UNIFORM BUILDING CODE OF AUSTRALIA (BCA) greatly enhances the safety of *new pools*. The code requires that pools built since April 1991 which are deeper than 300 mm must have "suitable barriers to restrict access by young children to the immediate pool surrounds". The ACT, Tasmania and Victoria have adopted this clause of the BCA. South Australia's requirements are due to be amended. Queensland and Western Australia have introduced specific state legislations requiring all new pools to be fenced (but including the house wall as part of the fence).

In all states except Queensland, most *previously existing pools* remain either unprotected or with a perimeter fence that offers no protection to a child living on or visiting the property. What is the present situation in your state?

ACT

The ACT requires fences for *new pools* that restrict access by young children to the immediate pool surrounds. Fences and gates and any doors or windows that open onto the pool must comply with the Australian Standard. *Existing pools* must have fences separating the pool from other properties, public spaces and driveways.

New South Wales

New legislation, effective from August 1992, has been introduced in place of the repealed Swimming Pools Act, 1990. The new law has created anomalies because some pool owners are exempt from providing fencing. All *existing and new pools* on properties of less than 230 sq m do not now need a child-resistant barrier to separate the pool from any house on the same block. One section exempts swimming pools on waterfront properties from having child-resistant barriers "so long as the means of access to the swimming pool from any residential building situated on the premises are at all times restricted".

Section seven of the new law requires neighbouring properties to be separated from the pool by a child-resistant barrier. The law defines a barrier as a fence or wall and includes any gate or door set into a fence or wall. Another section exempts pools on properties of two hectares or more from barrier requirements, providing certain access requirements from the property are met. Such provisions in the legislation are less than acceptable.

The NSW law does provide for the establishment of a Pool Fencing Advisory Committee consisting of five members from: the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Health, the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of Australia, the Department of Psychology at Sydney University and one member appointed by the Minister for Health and Community Services. Its function will be to consider data on drownings and recommend changes to the Act. At the time of writing this group had not been convened but hopefully it will take an independent and objective stance when reviewing the effectiveness of the legislation.

Northern Territory

The Darwin (Private Swimming Pool) By-Laws 1983 require pools to be fenced so as to provide a "reasonably effective" barrier to small children. The minimum requirement is for perimeter fencing. The Northern Territory Local Government Act empowers councils to make their own by-laws in relation

to regulation of private swimming pools and the majority of municipalities have exercised these powers. These council by-laws require private pools to be enclosed by a fence, wall or building (or a combination of these), which must be no less than 1.2 metres high with self-closing gates and doors. Isolation fencing is the option recommended by Darwin City Council for pool owners with small children.

Queensland

State legislation requires fencing for new pools separating the pool from the house and from neighbouring properties. Fences and gates must comply with the Australian Standard and windows with direct access to the pool must be barred or have restricted opening. Some local councils have more stringent requirements and some require four-sided fencing. *Existing pools* were to comply with the legislation by March 31, 1992; doors that meet the Australian Standard for self-latching and self-closing were permitted to open onto those pools. Requirements for homes on more than one acre may vary.

South Australia

Under the Swimming Pools (Safety Act) 1972, it is an offence (carrying a fine of \$200) for any pool not to be enclosed by a fence at least 1.2 m high, which is child-resistant and has a self-latching gate. The fence can include the house — this means the minimum fencing required is on the perimeter of the property. A Government Green Paper proposing mandatory isolation fencing for *new pools*, with a range of options for *existing pools*, was released for comment in June 1990. Two years late the form of pool fencing required has still not been clarified.

Tasmania

Tasmania recently adopted the Uniform Building Code of Australia, so the standard of fencing required for *new pools* is the same as that for the ACT. There is no other legislation to cover *existing pools*.

Victoria

Pools built after April 1991 are covered by the Uniform Building Code of Australia, which requires fences to restrict access by young children to the immediate pool surrounds; fences and gates must be consistent with the Australian Standard. Local council building surveyors determine if fences meet the code. *Pools built between August 1988 and April 1991* require fences to the Australian Standard or a continuous barrier not less than 1.65 m high, which may incorporate fences or walls of buildings, and gates must conform to the Australian Standard. In effect, the minimum requirement is for a fence at the perimeter of the property. *Pools built before August 1988*, totalling around 200 000, do not necessarily have to have any fencing.

Western Australia

Any new pool built after July 1, 1992, must be enclosed so as to "restrict access by young children to it and its immediate surroundings". If the council declares it to be impractical to otherwise enclose the pool, then doors and windows may open onto the pool provided they are fitted with devices to restrict access. It is understood this would not usually be permitted. Fences and gates must comply with the Australian Standard.

ELECTRIC FRYPANS

(August 1992)

A few of these old faithfuls of the kitchen are moving with the times — but for the more health-conscious cook the KAMBROOK KD66 is a steamer as well as a frypan, and you can buy steaming attachments for some of the others. A number of pans also featured non-stick surfaces — but not all of the surfaces stayed put throughout the test. However, we were relieved to find out there's probably no harm in eating small quantities of non-stick coatings if they wear off.

Problems with three of the frypans tested led us not to include them in our *What to buy* list, but the seven listed below are all worth considering. The SUNBEAM FP242 is deeper than the others and the BLACK & DECKER AF93 wider; other differences relate mainly to the construction material, whether they have a non-stick coating or not, and price — performance didn't vary much between models. For value it's hard to go past the SUNBEAM FP241 Super Clean — it's cheaper than the three leaders but very close in scores, and has a non-stick coating inside and out.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
SUNBEAM FP242 Super Deep	89/120
equal KAMBROOK KD66 Multi Steamer	89/131
BLACK & DECKER AF93 Super Large	95/119
SUNBEAM FP241 Super Clean	79/98
SUNBEAM FP234 Gourmet	105/129
BLACK & DECKER AF90 Traditional	56/89
SUNBEAM FP220 Classic	59/85

SMALL MICROWAVE OVENS

(June 1992)

These magic mates haven't entirely enchanted us yet. Technologically speaking they perform well, but we'd like to see less emphasis on speed of cooking — in many cases the instructions are not accurate enough and some automatic programs just don't do the job they claim to.

We tested for manual cooking, manual defrosting and automatic defrosting, and scored for ease of use too. Although some ovens came out better than others, none was good at *everything*. So our advice is to think about what you're likely to use the microwave oven for before you pick the one in the *What to buy* list best suited to your needs — the profiles in the original report will help.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order within types)	Price (\$)
BASIC	
SAMSUNG The Timesaver M7145	239/339
GOLDSTAR MA-650ME	239/249
COMPLEX	
SANYO Contempo Cook EM 710F	229/299
PANASONIC The Genius NN5750	299/359

HANDHELD BLENDERS

(November 1992)

Compared to benchtop blenders, many handheld models are cheaper and more convenient to use and store. So what's the hitch? The downside is they don't work quite as well — they can't handle the same range of foods, nor large quantities. Within these limitations, most of those tested performed well.

All eight handheld blenders we tested worked well on soft foods like soups and sauces. Four of the models had a mill or grinder attachment, which means they can also tackle dry foods such as herbs, parmesan cheese, nuts and coffee.

We named the BRAUN Multipractic Set MR300CA as the best buy.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order within types)	Price (\$)
HANDHELD BLENDERS WITH MILL	
BAMIX L133	150/225
equal BAMIX S100	100/125
BRAUN Multipractic Set MR300CA	79/90
BLACK & DECKER Wand FP15W	61/90
HANDHELD BLENDERS WITHOUT MILL	
KENWOOD A178	35/59
RONSON Wonder Blender 8340	30/43
BLACK & DECKER Slender Blender SB20	35/45
MOULINEX Robot Marie Turbo 071	75/99

FAMILY-SIZED FRIDGES

(September 1992)

Amazingly enough, after so many years there are still dud fridges out there, so make sure you don't buy one of them. In this test of 300-350 L fridges, the GORENJE PACIFIC HZS 311 and the FUJITSU GENERAL ER360 FB weren't up to scratch and were 'not recommended'. Out of the 11 we tested, we picked four which were substantially ahead of the others in terms of performance and ease of use. Unfortunately for current fridge buyers, of these four, only the WESTINGHOUSE detailed below is still available.

WHAT TO BUY	Price (\$)
WESTINGHOUSE RE351G-3	799/939

MEDIUM-SIZED FRIDGES

(March 1992)

We tested a dozen 200-299 L fridges and found two, the LEMAIR 270G and FUJITSU GENERAL ER220FB, whose poor insulation caused us to class them 'not recommended'.

We looked at both cyclic and frost-free types and found that although frost-free models are usually more expensive, they didn't perform any better as a group.

Checking out the energy efficiency claims — represented in the number of stars given on the energy label, the more the better — we found eight of the fridges were true to their word. But two performed worse (the LEMAIR dropping from a low two-star to an even more disappointing one-star rating, and the GORENJE PACIFIC RF270C rating three stars instead of its claimed four) and two did better — the FISHER & PAYKEL C250T and the KELVINATOR C225T-3.

Check the profiles in the original report for details of fridge and freezer layout, ease of cleaning, etc.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
250-299 L	
FRIGIDAIRE FP302ADP (FF)	750/900
KELVINATOR C300T-3	760/839
HOOVER B29TC	720/869
GORENJE PACIFIC RF270C	539/699
200-249 L	
equal SHARP SJ-229FW (FF)	625/699
FISHER & PAYKEL C240B (U)	599/719
FISHER & PAYKEL C250T	569/659
FRIGIDAIRE FP242ADP (FF)	660/799
equal KELVINATOR C225T-3	499/569
WESTINGHOUSE RE221G-2	499/579

FF — frost-free
U — upside-down model (fresh food compartment on top, freezer underneath)



COMMUNICATIONS

FAX MACHINES
(January 1992)

We gave you the full fax — do you need a voice request function or a polling feature? And what are they anyway? We found overall the fax machines were pretty evenly matched for quality of transmission and reception. But they shone — or blacked out — in different aspects of use. The SHARP UX120 came top for quality of transmission and also for ease of use, but it fell down on speed. One of the fastest machines, the OKIFAX OF-7, had poor-quality transmission of black and white photographs ("half-tones").

In case you're wondering, a voice request function is a way of letting the person on the other end know you want to talk to them once the faxing is finished. And polling is where one machine is set up for transmission and other machines may call up and instruct it to start.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
SHARP UX120	899/1450
OKIFAX OF-7	899/1200
NITSUKO SX-200	990/995
MITSUBISHI FA-60	975/1195
SANYO Sanfax 80	679/895
CANON Faxphone 8	699/1095

CELLULAR PHONES
(July 1992)

Quality doesn't always follow price, but in this test we found generally you get what you pay for: the top performer was also the most expensive. Interestingly, the UNIDEN CP5000, which scored top marks (100%) in the radio frequency tests (measuring the strength of the signal), did not do so well under practical conditions in the field. It was good at making calls but did not receive them very well.

These phones make calls by radio signals, and as in many cases they are the communication tool for the occupationally mobile, a reasonable battery life is vital. The TELECOM model had the longest of those tested, and we decided we couldn't recommend one model (the TECHNO-PHONE PC205A), whose battery only gave 44 minutes of talk time.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
TELECOM Walkabout-4B	1695/1895
NEC Neccel P3	1490/1850
UNIDEN CP 5000	1090/1650
NOKIA P4000	1100/1795
SUN MOON STAR TTR800	829/1590

ANSWERING MACHINES
(October 1992)

Just which machine is the answer to all your message-leaving requirements depends on the demands you plan to make of it. Features to choose between include dual or single tape (which will affect the time lapse between a caller hearing your message and leaving their own); remote playback of messages; and save default — where messages aren't automatically erased and can be retained for future reference.

For instance, we recommended the DUOFONE TAD-410 for people who expect a lot of messages, as it's dual-tape. It was also the easiest to use, but if you want to be able to ring in and listen to your messages it's no good — it has no remote playback. We chose to test the cheap end of the answering machine range, and it was the only dual-tape machine available in that price band; more expensive dual-tape models would no doubt have more features.

It's worth understanding what your options are before you buy an answering machine, to make sure you buy the one that's got the features you need. See the profiles in the original report for details.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
DUOFONE TAD-410	130
KAMPROOK TAM 50	79/99
AUDIOLINE 830	89/119
AUDIOLINE 860	100/139
RECORD A CALL 900	79
RECORD A CALL 950	99
TELECOM Monitor 301	98/99



HOUSEHOLD

CLOTHES DRYERS
(March 1992)

If you have small children or pets who might be tempted to climb into a clothes dryer, ask some key questions about a dryer before buying it: if the door is closed after being opened mid-cycle, does it start automatically? Can the door be pushed open from inside?

Other than that, you might take a closer look at feature options. Several machines have racks for drying things like shoes that you wouldn't want to tumble in the dryer. Some have an anti-crease cycle which keeps clothes tumbling after the drying cycle has finished.

Of the six dryers which had the edge and were in our original *What to buy* list, the two SIMPSONs below are the only ones still available. The main reason other dryers tested didn't make the list was a poor score for energy efficiency — which will ultimately cost you money as well as being environmentally unhelpful.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
SIMPSON Duet Electronic 1350SR	349/469
SIMPSON Maxidry 1200S	279/325

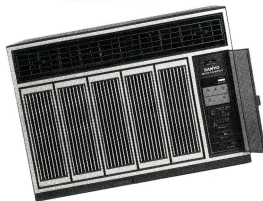
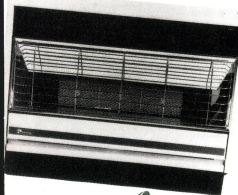


UNFLUED GAS HEATERS (April 1992)

To flue or not to flue? Poisonous gas emissions are no longer a problem as long as the heater is in proper working condition and the room is well ventilated. So you might choose an unflued gas heater for reasons of convenience (they are movable and easier to install) and cost (cheaper to buy and more fuel-efficient). But check your state's regulations first — there are restrictions on the use of unflued gas heaters in SA, Victoria and WA.

Two models out of 12 tested made it to our 'not recommended' list because they weren't much good at heating! Choosing from the others, it's important to buy one which is right for the size of room you want to heat — we've listed minimum room sizes in brackets after the model names below. Look back at the information-packed article for details on getting the right heater for your situation.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
PYROX Executive (105 m ³)	619/795
RINNAI Galaxie (105 m ³)	655/822
PYROX Cadet 17 (85 m ³)	568/665
PYROX Cadet 15 (75 m ³)	499/612
equal EVERDURE Crusader (90 m ³)	626/730
equal RINNAI Titan (70 m ³)	513/660
BEEFEATER Banksia (95 m ³)	499/605



IRONS (March 1992)

The top-ranking iron, MOULINEX 102, is no longer available — which is a shame as our trialists were unanimous in their enthusiasm for it. And unfortunately we haven't yet tested its replacement, MOULINEX 236. What was so good about it? Good steam, very good spray, a well-positioned cord and a well-shaped tip which was just right for those fiddly bits.

It seems there's more to an iron than meets the eye. Models scored badly for poorly directed sprays, inflexible cords and sharp tips which got caught on clothes and broke threads.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
PHILIPS Comfort 200HD 1462	49/79
PANASONIC NI-421E	55/89
PHILIPS Comfort 100 HD1461	30/50
equal PANASONIC NI-451E	69/89
BLACK & DECKER MR10E	39/45
BLACK & DECKER MR15ES	50/60

REVERSE-CYCLE AIR CONDITIONERS (November 1992)

These air conditioners can keep you cool as cucumber in summer and warm as toast in winter — which is why they're popular in states which need both heating and cooling throughout the year. We tested eight of these flexible products and can recommend five of them, listed below.

Three — the MITSUBISHI MSH-08GV, BRADWAY RAR 100 and LEMAIR RC240 — didn't cool very well, just one of the reasons we couldn't recommend them. In the *What to buy* list, the SANYO SA-91AH5 and the HITACHI RA-3101CHA were way ahead of the rest in terms of both cooling and heating — but if you're worried about noise, the DAIKIN is a quieter choice.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)*
SANYO SA-91AH5	795/1050
HITACHI RA-3101CHA	849/1075
DAIKIN WY22M	987/1062
FUJITSU AKT9RAF	799/959
CARRIER 51QG109	800/1088

* Prices do not include installation.

PERSONAL

MOISTURISERS (December 1991)

One of the humblest contestants came out top in this beauty parade. TANIA Vitamin E Moisturising Creme (from Woolworths), at 84 cents per 100 g, was the best all-round performer — and one of the more expensive, \$79.17 per 100 g, rolled in last.

The survey involved over 600 subscribers using 95 different moisturisers and reporting back with their comments. To score the products we asked trialists to assess how the product felt on their cheeks. We also asked them to report eye and skin problems and whether they'd use the product again. The ones that came out better pleased more of the people more of the time — preference for a moisturiser is as individual as a person's skin, so even the top scorers weren't popular with everyone. The ones in our *What to buy* list are a good starting point when choosing from the multitude, however.

WHAT TO BUY	Price (\$)
IN ORDER OF 'SKIN PERFORMANCE' SCORE	
TANIA Vitamin E Moisturising Creme* (250 g)	2.64/2.70
DERMASTINE Face Creme with 2% Elastin (50 g)	42.95
BIO-SWISS Moisturising Day Creme (60 g)	11.30/15.00
HEROME Skin Perfection Moisturizer (50 mL)	25.00/29.95
L'OREAL Plenitude Action Liposomes Daily Restructuring Treatment (50 mL)	25.95/33.10
BABOR Hydrovita Day Cream (50 mL)	47.00
HELENA RUBINSTEIN Skin Life TPA Anti-Wrinkle Force (50 mL)	82.00
equal NIVEA Light Facial Moisturising Creme (100 g)	8.10
OIL OF ULAN Sensitive Skin Moisture Protection Creme (100 g)	10.29/13.00
TARGET Moisturising Lotion with Vitamin E and Evening Primrose Oil (500 mL)	4.75

* Now called CLASSICS by TANIA Vitamin E Moisturising Creme.



HOME WORKSHOP

CORDLESS DRILLS
(January 1992)

When the going gets tough, some of these drills get going better than others. But you might not be planning to use a drill for heavy jobs like roof bolting — so to be fair, we divided the list and ranked the drills in two groups: best for heavy loads or extended use (and generally more expensive); and for medium loads or small jobs only.

The profiles in the original report give a good idea of what to expect from each model. We broke the profiles into two groups too; if you're looking for a drill for light jobs only, a cheaper model will probably be sufficient.

WHAT TO BUY	Price (\$)
FOR HEAVY LOADS OR EXTENDED USE	
RYOBI TFD229R	299/315
NATIONAL E2570BK	297/379
HITACHI D10HD	259/320
METABO BE AK 96/2 R+L	270/308
FOR MEDIUM LOADS OR SMALL JOBS ONLY	
RYOBI TFD150R	186/245
MAKITA 6012DW	149/269
NATIONAL E2561B/EY561B	179/258

ORBITAL SANDERS
(June 1992)

We compared the newer random orbital sanders with traditional 1/3-sheet ones and found they were easier to use and able to take more wood off. They left fewer streak marks on varnished wood and on the whole were faster to use. However, to get the same quality of finish as the traditional sanders you need to change to a finer-grit sandpaper — an easy operation that makes them more versatile.

A number of sanders have dust collection systems, but some worked better than others — wear a dust mask and eye protection when using a sander.

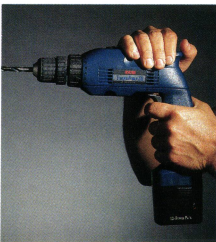
WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
METABO SXE 125 (random)	215/262
BOSCH PEX 125 AE (random)	149/200
METABO SR 221 (1/3-sheet)	158/183
HITACHI FS 10SA (1/3-sheet)	79/100
equal MAKITA 9035SB (1/3-sheet)	79/92
AEG 230 (1/3-sheet)	95/139

ELECTRIC HEAT GUNS
(February 1992)

A heat gun is just one way to remove paint — but does it work? The answer is it depends on the type of paint and what sort of surface it's covering. Almost all the heat guns we tested did a satisfactory job of removing oil-based paint from flat, smooth surfaces, but none did as well in removing water-based paints. And as you need to use a scraper in conjunction with the gun, if you can't get at an area with your scraper, a heat gun's not going to be much help.

Our conclusion? Think carefully about how you plan to use the heat gun and check other methods would not be more suitable — chemicals or sanding will sometimes do the job better.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
STEINEL HL 1800E	129/149
BOSCH PHG 600 CE	157/190
RYOBI PS 1600IV	65/94
equal BLACK & DECKER 4600K	125/149
BOSCH PHG 520	88/110
STEINEL HL 1500S	86/99
AEG Powertherm 550	92/110
equal ARLEC EHG998	50/79
BLACK & DECKER BD 1600	49/60
STEINEL HL 2000P Electronic	195/197



ENTERTAINMENT

CHAMPAGNE AND AUSTRALIAN
SPARKLING WINES
(December 1991)

We burst the bubble on champagne talk and gave you hints on what to buy when money's no object (DOM PERIGNON 1982 — a vintage unfortunately no longer available) or when the thought of spending much more than \$10 is likely to make you froth (SEPPELT Fleur de Lys Premium Cuvée).

And could our wine experts pick the pricey ones — even in a blind test? Yes, they could, but your taste buds might not be quite so discerning, so pick from what's left of the CHOICE 'mixed dozen' (which included all the categories from cheap to premium) at the price which suits your pocket.

WHAT TO BUY	Price (\$)
SPARKLING WINES STILL AVAILABLE FROM THE CHOICE MIXED DOZEN	
SEAVIEW Brut	5/9
SEPPELT Fleur de Lys Premium Cuvée	9/15
SEPPELT Salingier Brut	24/31
CHARLES HEIDSIECK	36/59
TAITTINGER Brut	38/63
LOUIS ROEDERER Brut	45/73
MOET & CHANDON Brut Imperial 1986	56/76
BOLLINGER Grande Année 1985	70/88



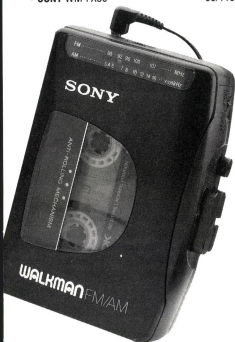
PERSONAL STEREOS (December 1991)

If you want to avoid the cheap and nasty, you need to spend over \$50. Otherwise you could end up with a personal stereo with poor headphones, stiff cassette doors and a tendency to chew up tapes.

The SONY WM-FX10 was the best in the under \$100 stakes, even without features like auto reversing and a graphic equaliser; it seemed to do well enough without them. It was also one of the models least disturbed by joggling movements.

None of the models had exactly the correct tape speed — one played Paul Simon 4.8% faster than it should have, making him sound like a Chipmunk, according to our tester! But with most models the error wasn't significant enough to affect listening quality.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
equal SONY WM-FX10	59/79
SANYO MGR201	59/89
equal SONY WM-FX30	99/110



MEDIUM-SIZED TELEVISIONS (July 1992)

We put a lot of emphasis on picture quality in this test, as after all, that's what you buy a television for. But we also tested the sound quality and the radio frequency sensitivity (to see how well a set can pick up weak signals) and assessed how easy the TVs were to use — we tuned each set, followed the instructions and used the remote controls.

The SONY KV 1984AS had the best picture and came out best overall, but any model in the *What to buy* list is worth considering.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
equal SONY KV 1984AS	829/924
TEMPEST TE20RMT	499/625
TOSHIBA 207R9A	629/729
PANASONIC TC-48R60	569/720

CAR RADIO/CASSETTE PLAYERS (June 1992)

This is another product area where you can't have it all: the car radio/cassette players which came out top overall were only averagely easy to use (the ALPINE and SONY listed below). But as long as you can cope with small controls, the good radio performance and good sound quality will be music to your ears.

We couldn't recommend the SPARK-OMATIC Richmond we tested because it was so difficult to use we figured it could hinder safe driving.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
ALPINE 7190E	349/399
equal SONY XR-5250	340/449
REALISTIC 12-1938	250/400



GARDEN

ELECTRIC LAWNMOWERS (February 1992)

Hover mowers came out better than wheeled models — they're easier to use and cut grass better. But perfection is too much to ask for from a mower, it seems: they all have some weaknesses — one of the top-performing FLYMOS, for instance (the E400), was a good performer even on long grass but threw up a lot of dust and grass all over the person mowing, and was the heaviest of the hover mowers tested.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
equal FLYMO E30 (hover)	199/315
FLYMO E400 (hover)	310/415
FLYMO XE30 (hover)	310/396
BLACK & DECKER GX300 (hover)	205/299
FLYMO RE350 (wheeled)	329/469
FLYMO RE300 (wheeled)	273/367

SECATEURS (October 1992)

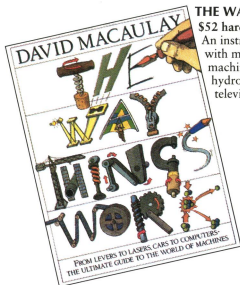
For such a simple operation — cutting through twigs and stems — garden secateurs seem extremely complicated items. There are differences in cutting action — anvil or bypass; and design — Swiss or modern. Prices vary between \$5 and \$100; quite apart from the variety of brands to choose from, many brands offer 10 models. They also differ in handle shape, stiffness, width of opening, locking mechanisms, etc.

So how on earth do you choose? We suggest you try before you buy, as ease is in the hand of the user — what feels comfortable and effective is very much an individual matter. You won't be able to see how well a pair of secateurs cuts, but you can open and close the blades and get an idea of how they handle.

In our trial, two models emerged as above average overall: FELCO Model 4 and WOLF TOOLS RR 19. Another one in our *What to buy* list below, the NBL Classic CGS-76, was the best-liked model for cutting ability alone.

WHAT TO BUY (in rank order)	Price (\$)
equal FELCO Model 4	62/85
WOLF TOOLS RR19	39/40
FHP Handyman C378	13/24
equal MARATHON 4300 Bypass	20
NBL Classic CGS-76	25/30

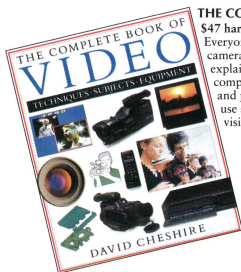
CONSUMER BOOKSHELF



THE WAY THINGS WORK

\$52 hardcover 384pp

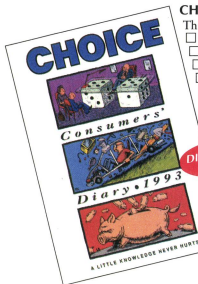
An instructive and entertaining reference book, with marvellous illustrations, explaining how machines work — including computers, hydrofoils, rockets, cameras, video recorders, televisions and calculators. A brilliant book.



THE COMPLETE BOOK OF VIDEO

\$47 hardcover 224pp illustrated

Everyone who uses or would like to use a video camera would appreciate this clear guide. It explains how the technology works; how to compose and light shots; how to track, zoom and pan; how to create a sequence; how to use special techniques; and how to edit vision and sound.



CHOICE CONSUMERS' DIARY 1993

This diary contains these popular features:

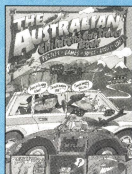
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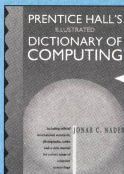
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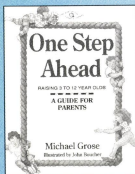
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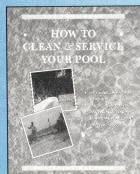
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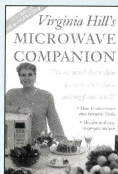
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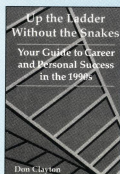
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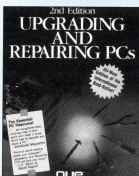
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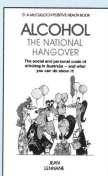
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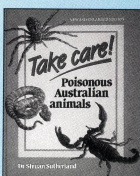
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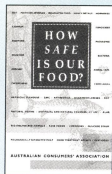
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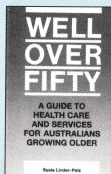
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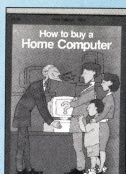
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IN-LINE SKATES

*When the going gets tough, the tough show what they're made of
and the weak buckle under.*

LET A GROUP of teenagers tear round their school grounds on a set of in-line skates; get an expert to wear them for zigzagging, ramp riding and speeding down hills; simulate a run over a bumpy road for 10 hours and what have you got? A rigorous CHOICE test for in-line skates which shows you just what you get for your money.

WHAT IS AN IN-LINE SKATE?

In-line skates were designed for ice hockey players to train out of season or at least out of the ice rink. A line of wheels replaces the blade — so they consist of a boot attached to a number of wheels, usually four.

Some skates are specialised for speed skating or acrobatics, others are more general-purpose. A street skate — like the ones we tested — is good for roads and pavements but can be used for some acrobatics too.

For more details on the construction of these skates, refer to *What to look for in an in-line skate* overleaf.

IF THE SKATE FITS, WEAR IT

Correct fit is vital — otherwise a skate will never ride well. Too tight and it'll also give you cramps, too much movement in the boot and you'll be plagued by blisters.

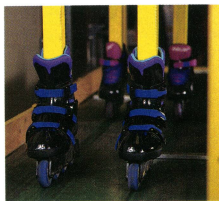
Unfortunately for those wanting to buy in-line skates as a gift, sizing is a hit and miss affair. "Each country has its own sizing system for in-line skates. Taiwan has four!" explains Bill Vertocci, owner of the shop Manly Blades. This means the skates are not an over-the-counter product and must be tried on before buying.

At Manly Blades, staff do what Mr Vertocci calls a 'shell sizing'. They remove the inner boot from the skate and place the foot in the outer shell, putting the toes as far forward as they'll go. A correct fit means there's a half to three-quarter inch space (about 1.25 to 2 cm) behind the heel. Some brands also tend to be narrower or wider than others, so if one brand feels very loose or tight across the foot, it may be worth trying on a few other brands.

Some specialist shops may also adjust the outer shell, stretching it by heating if necessary. And for the serious skater, custom-made inner soles may give extra support.



The trialists (above), the expert (top right), and the 'rolling road' (right) — three rigorous tests for the skates.



PROTECT THYSELF

You may have noticed a spate of newspaper stories about the dangers of in-line skating, with the sport being blamed for a surge in fractures of wrists, arms and hands among children. There's no doubt about it, protective gear is a must. So what do you need?

■ **Wrist protectors** — these cushion the wrists and hands. These and knee guards are the bare minimum for skating.

■ **Knee guards** — these have a hard padded shell over the joint to help cushion falls.

■ **Elbow protectors** — like the knee guards, these padded bands shield the joint with a hard convex shell.

■ **A helmet** that fits well and has a good clasp that won't slip open. Essential for children; adults should at least wear a helmet when doing more than a gentle cruise.

PUTTING THEM TO THE TEST

A good skate should be comfortable to wear, smooth to ride and manoeuvrable, as well as durable. We wanted to see how the

skates fitted these criteria in normal riding, so we set up two user trials. In addition we tested the durability of each skate using our 'rolling road'. This is a sort of moving conveyor belt with bumps at regular intervals over which the skates are fixed to roll along, simulating travelling along a bumpy road.

We chose eight pairs of skates from the low end of the price range, taking one model each from nationally available brands. Where there was more than one model, we bought the one nearest to \$200. We also included a higher-priced skate, the ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade at \$499, to see if you get more when you pay more.

BACK TO SCHOOL

For one and a half hours each day for a week, eight teenagers from Marrickville High School became CHOICE trialists. The session would start in a schoolroom with words of encouragement from the teachers — "Brian, put your elbows on!" — and

(text continued on page 26)

PROFILES

In order of final ranking. Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992.



ROLLERBLADE AEROBLADE



MALIBU T900 TECHLINE



BAUER XE/5



OZI MONOLINE



ROCES MUC



BLADELINE NITRO

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING A SKATE

Inner boot

Look for one with compressed foam (it should feel compacted) as it will maintain its support for longer. Normal foam may appear comfortable at first but it will compress with use and lose its support.

Tongue

A tough plastic-coated tongue stops the buckles or laces digging into your feet.

Buckles or laces

Buckles stay tighter than laces; they should be strong and not too difficult to open and close.

Air vents**Axles****Wheels**

They come in different sizes (diameter 60 to 82 mm) and hardnesses. What do you want to use the skate for? Softer wheels have better grip but hard wheels are best for ramp riding. For street skating we recommend a 70 mm wheel in 80A hardness (the range is 78A to 85A, where the bigger the number, the harder the wheel).

Outer shell — made up of upper shell and lower shell.

Upper shell. Feel the thickness and test the strength by pressing the ankles. A strong outer shell helps the skate maintain its shape while you're skating and will aid balance.

Pivot point. This allows ankle movement without bending the skate. A skate with a cut between the upper and lower shell also allows flexibility, but the skate tends to bend, losing its shape and support while skating. On the other hand, a skate without a pivot point or cut will give more support, but restrict ankle movement.

Lower shell

Chassis. Needs to be robust: thick, or, if thin, look for bracing between the wheels for extra support.

Stopper bracket**Stopper**

If the skate has a **rocker setting** (where the two middle wheels can be set lower so that only two wheels are touching the ground) — how easy is it to adjust? Ask for a demonstration and try the adjustment yourself. Does it use a simple nut mechanism or are there plugs and washers to complicate matters? A rocker setting is good for cornering but makes straight-line skating unstable, especially for beginners — so check the skate can be adjusted to a flat setting.

ROLLERBLADE AEROBLADE

Price: \$480/\$500

Overall impression

Our school testers rated this "the best" — giving it very good or good scores for comfort, stability, smoothness and so on. It was ahead of the rest in four out of six of the expert tests, and although not the best for cornering, it was still good. It also survived the durability test with very little wear.

Note that it's in a higher price range than the others we tested — we wanted to see if you get what you pay for, and it seems you do. The same may be true of other skates costing this much.

Fastenings: Three buckles.

Good points

- First in expert test and school trial.
- In good condition after testing.
- Well designed two-part outer shell with pivot point.
- Compressed foam inner boot.
- Hard plastic tongue.
- Top scorer for initial ease of use.

Bad points

- Slightly tricky rocker/flat setting adjustment.

MALIBU T800 TECHLINE

Price: \$148/\$178

Overall impression

A good all-rounder, this skate was voted fourth by the school testers and joint third by the expert. It was also one of the skates which survived the durability test well. At this price this is good value for money.

Fastening: Three buckles.

Good points

- Second-highest for initial ease of use.
- In generally good condition after durability test.

Bad points

- Thin one-piece outer shell.
- Slightly tricky rocker/flat setting adjustment.

BAUER XE/5

Price: \$249/\$380

Overall impression

The skate scored generally well in all the expert tests, but the teenagers didn't agree and ranked it seventh — largely because it was very difficult to put on. It also got knocked back slightly in the durability test as the wheels started to come apart.

Fastenings: Laces and one buckle.

Good points

- Thick, well designed, two-part outer shell with pivot point.
- Easy rocker/flat setting adjustment.

Bad points

- Buckles awkward to fasten.

OZI MONOLINE

Price: \$180/\$269

Overall impression

This skate is permanently set at the rocker adjustment, which means it's good for cornering and ramp riding, but it wobbles in straight-line riding — "The skates were hard to control. They wanted to go in every direction but straight ahead," as our expert noted. So it's not one for the beginner.

Fastenings: Three buckles.

Good points

- Hard plastic tongue.
- Bad points
- Stopper wore down by half in one use on one of our samples.
- Thin outer shell with cut did not keep its shape well.
- Tongue awkward to fit into boot.

ROCES MUC

Price: \$199/\$229

Overall impression

The soft wheels may have boosted performance: the skates did very well in both slower and high-speed cornering tests (it came top) and high-speed straight-line riding. But after only three hours on the rolling road rig, one wheel had disintegrated.

Fastenings: Laces and one buckle.

Good points

- Thick, very hard, two-piece outer shell with pivot point.
- Easy rocker/flat adjustment.
- Compressed foam inner boot.
- Bad points
- Difficult to put on.
- Poor performance in durability test.

BLADELINE NITRO

Price: \$195/\$235

Overall impression

The school trialists liked this skate and ranked it second. It did quite well in the expert categories too, except for the high-speed cornering test. The expert commented, "They slipped all over the place ... and they lost traction totally." So the expert score was brought down.

Fastenings: Three buckles.

Good points

- Hard plastic tongue.
- Hardly any wear in durability test.
- Easy rocker/flat setting adjustment.
- Bad points
- Thin outer shell, with upper and lower shell separated by cut, does not hold its shape well.

ROLLERBLADE MONDOBLADE (BLADERUNNER II)

Price: \$189/\$199

Overall impression

The Mondoblade was not available in the larger

size needed for our expert so we used a **Bladerunner II** instead, which the distributor says is the same. Our school trialists complained of dragging, slipping and sliding — "I felt like falling all the time" — and ranked this skate sixth. It had stoppers on both feet (usually one is sufficient) and this made some riding awkward. It also lost marks in the durability test, so all in all, nothing special.

Fastenings: Laces.

Good points

- Thick, well designed, two-part outer shell with pivot point.
- Bad points
- Soft tongue which wore on rolling road.
- Laces were difficult to do up tightly.
- After the rolling road, some bearings needed replacing, having heated up enough to melt the wheel slightly.
- No rocker/flat setting adjustment — flat only.

LAZER BLADEZ

Price: \$80/\$90

Overall impression

This skate doesn't have a lot to recommend it. The school trial placed it last, and in the expert tests it was consistently in the bottom three scores. The durability test highlighted a number of weak areas too.

Fastenings: Laces and one buckle.

Good points

- Thick, well designed, two-part outer shell with pivot point.
- Easy rocker/flat setting adjustment.
- Dual sizing — a removable inner sole means it can accommodate two foot sizes.

Bad points

- Bearings wore away in durability test, resulting in wobbly wheels. The bearings had also heated up and made the axle too hot to touch.
- After the rolling road the tongue had also puckered in some places and the inner boot was in bad condition.

VARIFLEX EXCELL

Price: \$139/\$168

Overall impression

Another poor performer. These were unpopular with the teenagers — the buckles came loose and they were not comfortable, as the tongue dug into the foot. They did not do well in the expert tests and one of the wheels broke after 5½ hours on the rolling road.

Fastenings: Three buckles.

Good points

- Nothing in particular.
- Bad points
- Thin plastic outer shell has upper and lower parts separated by deep cut, giving very poor support; it did not hold its shape at all, especially when cornering.
- Difficult rocker/flat setting adjustment.
- Poor durability — wear in wheels, bearings and tongue.

BEST
BUY

IN-LINE SKATES

Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Price (\$)*	1	2	3	4
				Tools	Adjustable rocker settings	School trial rating	Expert score (%)
ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade	Hardcore Enterprises	Italy	480/500	✓	4	★★★	84
MALIBU T900 Techline	K-Mart	Taiwan	148/178	✓	2	★★	72
BAUER XE/5	Addlon Trading	Italy/Canada (A)	249/380	✓	2	★★	72
OZI Monoline	Addlon Trading	Taiwan	180/269	✓	no	★★	69
ROCES MUC	Bursill Sportsgear	Italy	199/229	✓	4	★★★	74
BLADELINE Nitro	Skateworks	Taiwan	195/235	✓	2	★★★	67
ROLLERBLADE Mondoblade	Hardcore Enterprises	not stated	189/199		no	★★	61
LAZER BLADEZ	Skateworks	Taiwan	80/90		2	★	54
VARIFLEX Excell	Hardcore Enterprises	Taiwan	139/168		2	★	48

* Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992. (A) Shoe from Italy, chassis from Canada.

murmurs about the task in hand — "What skate am I today?"

Then it was out into the playground for the serious stuff. Immediately after putting on the skates — sometimes struggling with awkward buckles or a tongue which got in the way — each tester answered a series of questions about comfort, fit and stability (how wobbly do they feel?).

Then, after checking the coast was clear, the team did three circuits of a set route around the school. Heartbeats raised a little, they sat down for the second round of questions — how well did the skates hold their tightness? How well balanced did they feel? And so on. The most important question to answer was: "In general, how did you like the skates?"

This way each tester tried each skate and we got a surprisingly consistent picture of which skates were favourites, inviting comments such as "rolled the best", "the best tightness", "simply the best" (the **ROLLERBLADE** Aeroblades), and which didn't do so well in the popularity stakes — "Oh God ... terrible!", "I hate these ones" and "worst things I've ever ridden" (a variety).

EXPERT ANALYSIS

A second set of the skates was scrutinised more closely by an experienced in-line skater who was able to differentiate aspects of the skates' performance and put them through a number of different challenges: straight-line skating and zigzagging (each at medium and then high speed), and finally an acrobatics test using a ramp.

Each skate had several goes at the individual tests. For instance, in the slower straight-line test, the skater rolled down a gentle slope 75 metres long, six times for every skate. The high-speed zigzag test, which assessed cornering ability, was run three times.

After each test run the skater made detailed comments, picking out factors such as wobbliness, smoothness, the effectiveness of the stopper and the drag around corners.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH —
DURABILITY

After the school trial we took a close look at the skates for signs of wear and tear, before fixing them up on the rolling road for 10 hours each. We checked the skates every couple of hours throughout this test for breakages, and deducted points from the final score if there was serious damage.

This was a pretty tough test: each pair of skates was weighted with 43 kg. But it's still only 17½ hours of use altogether (trial plus rolling road) — a few weekends' riding perhaps? So what this test does is expose the particularly bad cases.

We should point out that even good-quality wheels will break or wear down eventually and can be replaced. The speed of wear depends on the weight of the rider and the way the skates are used. The more jumping on and off pavements, riding on rough ground and cornering, the quicker they'll wear out. It's impossible to say exactly how long you should expect out of wheels and bearings, but if they last a year of regular use, you're doing pretty well.

A full set of good-quality bearings costs around \$35 and a full set of wheels can cost anything from \$40 to \$130, depending on size and quality.

DO THE KIDS AND EXPERT AGREE?

There was a strong correlation between the preferences of our experienced skater and the Marrickville High trialists — with two exceptions, the **BAUERS** and the **BLADELINE** Nitros. The teenagers found the **BAUERS** very difficult to put on — "so hard it wasn't funny" — which put them off.

Despite an overall good rating, the expert also commented: "The buckles did not line up with the strap. It takes a fair bit of effort to put the buckles together."

The school trial ranked the **BLADELINE**s second, but although the skate did fairly well in most expert tests, it did poorly in the high-speed cornering, bringing the score down. The expert ranked them sixth.

All agreed the **ROLLERBLADE** Aeroblade was the best of the bunch — but so it should be at \$499, \$200 more than its nearest price rival in this test. It was in a class of its own in the test as it was the only one we included in its price bracket — we wanted to see if, generally speaking, you get what you pay for. So while we can say it's better than the others we tested, we can't say it's any better than others on the market in the higher price range.

Our final scoring combines the expert assessment and the durability test. So, for instance, the **ROCES** came second in the expert test, scoring top in the cornering tests, but they were penalised because of a wheel breakage in the durability test, which brought them down to equal fourth place.

The skate we've ranked second, the **MALIBU** T900 Techline, represents the best value for money — it's our Best Buy. But any of the top six skates in our table can be recommended.

WHAT TO BUY

Brand/model (in rank order)	Price (\$)*
ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade	480/500
\$S MALIBU T900 Techline	148/178
BAUER XE/5	249/380
OZI Monoline	180/269
ROCES MUC	199/229
BLADELINE Nitro	195/235

* Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992.

\$S Best Buy

5	6	7	
Durability	Subtract penalty	Final score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
Good	0	84	ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade
Good	0	72	MALIBU T900 Techline
1 wheel coming apart slightly	-2	70	BAUER XE/5
Good	0	69	OZI Monoline
1 wheel disintegrated after 3 hours	-5	69	ROCES MUC
Good	0	67	BLADELINE Nitro
Worn bearings; melted wheels	-4	57	ROLLERBLADE Mondoblade
Bearings wore very badly	-5	49	LAZER BLADEZ
Wheel broke after 5½ hours; tongue wore.	-5	43	VARIFLEX Excell

WEAR AND TEAR

THE SKATES were used for just 7½ hours' riding, and for 10 hours on the rolling road rig. But even in this relatively short time some of the skates began to fall apart:

- On delivery all boots were in good condition.
- Around eight hours of use later, after the school trial, the following skates were showing signs of wear:
 - LAZER BLADEZ: Bearings were wearing out.
 - OZI MONOLINE: A clip broke during the trial.
 - ROLLERBLADE Mondoblade: Wheels and bearings were worn a fair bit.
 - VARIFLEX Excell: Bearings worn and wobbling a bit.

Although these results didn't end up affecting the final scoring, the three skates already showing signs of wear in the wheels and bearings ultimately came bottom overall in our test.

- Three hours into the durability test (rolling road):
 - One of the ROCES wheels had disintegrated and come off its hub; the bearings were also a little worn.
- Another wheel broke after five and a half hours, this time on the VARIFLEX Excell skate. The straps had also worn away the plastic on the tongue and the bearings were wobbly.

- The moment of truth at the end of the 10-hour durability test:
 - The following skates were generally in good condition: ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade, MALIBU T900 Techline, OZI Monoline (apart from its broken clip) and BLADELINE Nitro. These were eventually ranked first, second, fourth and sixth respectively.
 - The LAZER BLADEZ's bearings were almost completely worn away, making the axles very hot to touch; the tongue had become puckered (which means it would wear more quickly), and the inner boot was in bad condition.
 - The ROLLERBLADE Mondoblade's axles were hot and had melted the wheels slightly. Some bearings were worn and the tongue had worn a lot.
 - A wheel on the BAUER was beginning to come off its hub and the tongue was puckered.

- In one test, when the expert skater whizzed down a hill and used the stopper to come to a halt, the OZI Monoline's rubber stopper was immediately worn away to about half its original length!

WARRANTIES

Although the distributors told us their skates were covered by warranties (of various lengths), only four were actually provided, and three of these (the two ROLLERBLADES and the VARIFLEX) had a US return address. We don't find this satisfactory for consumers. Bauer provided a warranty statement and form to fill in and keep but it did not have a contact address.

1 TOOLS

Some skates come with tools for dismantling the wheels or resetting the rocker/ flat setting.

2 ADJUSTABLE ROCKER SETTING

The figure refers to the number of wheels on each boot which can be adjusted to a higher setting for a 'rocker' position, so that only two wheels are touching the ground. The rocker setting gives better manoeuvrability so it's better for cornering, but is less stable, especially at high speeds in a straight line. All four of the ROLLERBLADE Aeroblade's wheels are adjustable, giving the greatest possible combination of settings.

Level setting



Rocker setting



3 SCHOOL TRIAL RATING

We've converted the scores from the school trial to stars to give an indication of how the school testers ranked each skate. The more stars the better.

4 EXPERT SCORE

We scored for initial comfort and a series of tests: straight line, zigzag, straight line at high speed, zigzag at high speed, and ramp riding. We weighted the results according to what we believed was important in a street skate, weighting the two straight-line tests and the two zigzag tests 20% each, and the other two 10% each.

5 DURABILITY

This shows how well the skates survived the rolling road test. We've noted any breakages or signs of wear and how soon they occurred.

6 SUBTRACT PENALTY FOR DURABILITY TEST

We deducted a penalty for poor performance in the durability test: the maximum deduction was five for a serious breakage such as a wheel totally disintegrating.

7 FINAL SCORE

This is calculated using the expert score and the penalty, if any, for the durability test.



THE AUSTRALIAN STANDARD

FLAG OF EXCELLENCE OR COMPROMISE?

A product carrying the StandardsMark will not necessarily be the safest or most efficient choice. Nor will it necessarily be the best performer ...

IF YOU THOUGHT buying a product with the Australian StandardsMark was smarter than buying one without, this article's for you.

The StandardsMark means more to importers and manufacturers than to consumers — even though we encourage you to look for it. The truth is, consumers have little else to go by when choosing products. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, Standards often fall short of what we consider to be adequate in terms of safety and efficiency. First of all, Standards are created by committees ...

Anyone who has ever been part of a committee will know how hard it is to get people to agree — Australian Standards committees are no exception. The result of the sometimes heated debates is too often a Standard which is compromised and geared towards manufacturing interests rather than those of consumers.

Because of this, you should regard the Australian Standard as the *minimum* standard that applies. It is not a standard of technological excellence — or safety.

The Australian StandardsMark simply means a product complies with the requirements of one particular Standard — AS9999, for instance. Each Standard is different, and the StandardsMark label doesn't explain what that Standard covers.

It's important to understand what this means in practice. Some Standards were never meant to cover safety; others exist purely to address safety issues. Some in-

clude safety, efficiency *and* performance. Others just specify how a product should be made, tested or graded. Some are electrical safety standards; some are purely industrial standards covering areas such as telecommunications, electrical equipment and wiring, boilers, mining equipment and so on; others are for everyday consumer items. The StandardsMark gives you no clues as to which applies to the type of product you're looking at.

Incidentally, there is no significance about the number of ticks (five) on the logo. It's the same label for all products.

Why aren't there more safety standards?

While consumers might think the Australian Standards exist for their protection, Standards Australia, the organisation which sets up committees and publishes standards, sees it differently. The organisation is mostly self-funding — it needs to sell copies of its Stand-

ards and encourage manufacturers to use the Standards logo in order to survive financially. Its customers are manufacturers and importers who choose to follow Standards. Consumer and safety Standards are a financial drag:

"None of the consumer standards comes anywhere near recouping the cost of producing it." — Standards Australia.

Six years ago a manufacturer asked the organisation for a bunkbeds Standard. "Just lodge \$10 000 and we'll start working on it," he was told. When the money ran out the manufacturer understood he would have to put in more. As one company, he said he simply couldn't afford it.

New lamps for old ...

If it's difficult to kick-start Standards Australia into making new safety Standards, it's equally difficult getting old Standards reviewed. Although until recently every

DO MANUFACTURERS HAVE TO COMPLY?

A MANUFACTURER or importer need not comply with the Australian Standard unless the Commonwealth or a state government has decided in the public's interest to turn it or parts of it into law (which makes it a 'mandatory Standard'). When this happens every manufacturer and importer must ensure their product complies with the Standard — but because they have to pay Standards Australia for the use of the StandardsMark, not all manufacturers will label their product to that effect. So you won't know that a cheaper product is covered by a mandatory Standard even though it doesn't carry the 'five ticks' logo.



Standards Australia's Quality of Service Committee gives an idea of how a committee system can become unwieldy — its full complement is 15 members. When we photographed a meeting, only seven members were present, from organisations as diverse as the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs, the Metal Trades Industries Association, the Australian Bankers' Association, the Institution of Engineers Australia, the Electricity Supply Association of Australia, the Institute of Quality Assurance, and Standards Australia itself.

Standard was supposed to be reviewed every five years, medical experts and consumer lobbyists have noticed the extreme reluctance with which Standards Australia sets dates for meetings — even when there's a community interest:

"Standards Australia ... has only been able to allocate four working days a year to update the playground Standard. At this rate the 10-year-old Standard will require another five years to revise!" — Safety expert.

One government representative says he thinks the problem has worsened under the 'user pays' system. Authorities which used to supply much-needed technical advice to Standards Australia committees free of charge no longer donate as much time or expertise as they did. Industry sees government pulling away from that commitment, and in turn has cut back its own contribution, only turning up to represent its own interests. Consumer groups too are under financial pressure to withdraw because of the perceived lack of benefits vs the costs.

Who decides?

Committees are invariably made up of many diverse and opposing interests — for example, the committee which decided it was necessary for a lifejacket to be able to turn an unconscious wearer onto his or her back to reduce the risk of drowning comprised representatives from 20 organisa-

tions. Two industry representatives subsequently wanted this requirement deleted.

What is eventually published as a Standard will depend very much on the lobbying skills, beliefs, expertise and downright persistence of the individuals involved. But even the voice of a strong, informed representative can be lost if the

be an independent organisation, this assertion relates more to its governance status than its policies. Its management is acutely aware of the political climate in which it operates (10% of its funding comes from the Commonwealth Government), but — perhaps more significantly — industry is its major customer.



"It is pointless to us to aim at levels of safety in the standards that are way above anything that is ever likely to come into legislation ..."

General Manager, Standards, Standards Australia.

majority has sided with industry or a particular interest group. Backroom lobbying can be extremely effective:

"The whole system was farcical. The consumer voice was grossly outnumbered and my hard-fought changes were discarded in an instant. The question is, how often does this happen?" — Community legal representative on the Building Contracts committee.

This consumer representative was trying to get the 'lock-out' clause deleted from building contracts, which says if you owe money the builder can refuse entry. Legally, this clause cannot stand up in court, so why include it?, he asks. Eventually this committee reached a stalemate, and the idea for a standard building contract was dropped.

Although Standards Australia claims to

Manufacturers protest vigorously against Standards which they see as too high, and are not likely to adopt any they consider to be costly.

Perhaps this is why some committees appear to be loaded with manufacturing interests. For instance, the pool industry association which is against mandatory fencing has two representatives on the Swimming Pool Fences committee — other groups have one.

Although Standards Australia says anyone with expertise or a reasonable cause can join a committee, this claim is hotly disputed. One medical expert said although his work had proved the need for a Standard on a particular safety issue, and had sparked community interest, his request to be part of the Standards committee was repeatedly denied.

Because the costs of attending committee meetings can be considerable (interstate travel, accommodation and perhaps the loss of a day or two's salary), smaller interest groups can't always afford to attend every meeting. Consequently consumer interests can get overlooked in their absence.

What do committees argue about?

A manufacturer who wants to stall an argument for greater safety can raise all sorts of objections: the point then has to be proved. During the debate over whether a Standard was needed for safer bunkbeds, one of the manufacturers claimed a safety standard wasn't necessary because in his state bunks were used mainly by adults. The researchers, who had based their argument for greater safety on the numbers of children injured in bunkbed accidents, conducted an expensive national telephone survey of bunkbed users to prove their point and keep the process moving. Not every representative has the resources to do this.

Which brings us to another point: this committee, which first met 18 months ago,

whether or not it kept the intruders out. Before I could blurt out a major objection a manufacturer who makes real security doors read the riot act — so industry told industry to pull its head in. — Consumers' Association representative.

How politics affect safety

Drafting safety into a Standard can be extremely difficult. Some people regard life—even children's lives—as being of small consequence. Attitude rules just as much as rational argument. There is the perpetual debate over the cost of safety vs the risk:

"If you want standards that protect the consumer more we are quite prepared to do them. I don't know who the hell is going to police them. I don't know what manufacturer is going to manufacture them, and worse still, who is going to buy them..." — General Manager, Standards, Standards Australia.

When the committee decided to include 'location' in its Standard for swimming pool fences, it created a furor which has not yet been resolved. The previous com-

ards Australia says three a year. But what happens when a check shows the product is not up to Standard?

"We don't just walk in and say you haven't done what you are supposed to do, give us your licence back. We are going to identify what the problem is, and be certain we give them every opportunity to take corrective steps..." — Standards Australia.

However, there is an allegation that Standards Australia has, in at least one instance, granted the StandardsMark approval in the face of controversy.

An angry letter written by an engineer to the chief executive officer of Standards Australia accuses the organisation of accrediting a controversial product (polybutylene water pipe and fittings) with the StandardsMark, even though according to the writer test results showed the product had failed several critical tests. Standards Australia is satisfied that the pipe meets the requirements. However, there are major concerns because failures in the pipe itself and in the fittings have caused millions of dollars' damage in homes throughout New Zealand and the US. Although modifications have been made to the fittings, some engineers are still concerned about passing a product which seems to only just pass a liberally worded Standard. The product itself is yet to withstand the passing of time without problems. The committee has been recalled to review the Standard; from a consumer viewpoint, there's a risk it may be reviewed in such a way that this product will have no difficulty in complying.

What seems to have happened in this committee is similar to the compromises made in others: the open or loose wording of a Standard allows a manufacturer (or Standards Australia) to take a liberal view in interpreting the intent of the committee.

Watch out!

A Standard can only be as good as its requirements. Standards which are less than optimal from the consumer's point of view include:

■ The Standard for bicycle helmets, which permits helmets to pass a security test when CHOICE tests have shown that in a real-life situation they can come off. (See *Microshell bicycle helmets*, CHOICE, October 1992.)

■ The Standard for dishwashers, which does not call for them to have child-resistant detergent dispensers, despite recorded incidents of toddlers swallowing the caustic residue.

■ Electric stoves and ranges Standards, which do not call for child-resistant controls, and also allow the surface temperatures to be too high.

■ The washing machine Standard, which has no adequate performance test for rinsing.

"People for some reason can accept motor car accidents but they can't accept some industrial accidents — electrocutions, for example. The danger inherent with all these things is not dissimilar but the community expectations are different."

General Manager, Standards, Standards Australia.

is yet to finalise a draft Standard. Part of the reason is the slowness with which Standards Australia handles the paperwork for consumer and general safety standards. Although the minutes of meetings for industrial Standards are normally published two weeks after each meeting, the bunkbeds committee is still waiting for the minutes of its last meeting — *five months* later.

It's also common for manufacturers to argue that because their product will not meet the proposed Standard, requirements should be 'watered down'.

"I was on the first Standards committee for security screen doors. One of the new people represented backyard fabricators. This particular guy made doors which were the artistic, cast-grille scroll type. We were talking about writing a clause into the Standard which stopped an intruder putting his hand through the grille and pushing the flyscreen part away to get to the inside of the lock. We were talking in terms of the dimension of the intruder's arm and the dimensions of the grille. This bloke across the table piped up and said, 'If you make it that small my grille won't pass.' It was a blatant attempt to write the Standard to include his product, with no regard for

*committee (and various state ministers at their own meetings) had agreed the best protection for pre-schoolers against accidental drowning lay in 'isolation' fencing. That is, the swimming pool should be adequately fenced off from the house and outdoor leisure areas. Before the votes were taken, Standards Australia agreed to allow two more anti-fencing lobbyists (making a total of three) to join the committee. This was an unusual situation for a Standards committee, and one that Standards Australia has been hard-pressed to explain — particularly since the addition of two more dissenting voices has effectively stonewalled the argument for safety. In the words of Standards Australia the committee is now "in a horrible mess". (See *A pool fence makes good sense* on page 6 for an in-depth report on the pool fencing issue.)*

Can you trust the StandardsMark?

Standards Australia says a StandardsMark proves a product has met the requirements of an Australian Standard; that the StandardsMark is awarded only if the product passes all the relevant tests and the manufacturer has agreed to "random and unannounced visits" during the year — Stand-

- The electric kettle and jug standard, which does not call for coiled cords — a relatively high proportion of kettle-related burns involve children tugging on the cord.
- The Standard which requires warning labelling about flammability on children's nightwear does not apply if the clothing is not classified as 'nightwear'. (Thus a pair of ski pyjamas need not be labelled if it looks like a lightweight track or play suit.)

Suggestions for change

Unless told otherwise, a consumer faced with choosing between two strollers, for example, will assume the one which says it complies with the Australian Standard is (a) safe and reasonably durable, and (b) better than the one without the claim. It's a scenario Standards Australia encourages — its brochure reads:

"The StandardsMark symbol ... is a valuable tool both in marketing and to gain point-of-sale advantage."

In fact, consumers need more information at the point of sale. While there's an argument that partial safety is better than nothing, consumers must not be covertly misled. Labels should include at least a reference to the type of requirements addressed by the named Standard. For example: *"This product complies with Standard AS9999, which includes requirements for construction, durability and performance."* Or a note: *"This Standard does not include safety requirements."*

Consumer groups are generally unhappy with the current ad hoc approach to safety. One remedy would be to have a second tier in Standards which deals with safety, or perhaps the StandardsMark could incorporate a 'safety tick', which could be awarded if known principles of safety such as entrapment hazards, stability, exterior temperatures, cut-out switches, height restrictions, no protrusions, etc, had been observed.

Alternatively, like the care label on clothing, one suggestion is to have a small safety checklist which names pre-specified criteria for safety for the given product, and which gives a tick or cross according to whether it meets those requirements.

Finally, there seems to be a need for an independent, safety-oriented organisation with the power to police and monitor any safety Standards it sets. The Consumers' Association would like to see a National Consumer Product Safety Commission established for this purpose. In the US such a commission has reportedly saved millions of injuries and deaths, and billions of US dollars in lost wages and medical costs since it began in 1973. □

ANNOUNCING

THE SIXTH CHOICE SUBSCRIBER DRAW

For new CHOICE subscriptions and renewals
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On 4 January next year, we'll be holding our sixth Subscriber Draw. The lucky winner will be able to choose any three products from the following tests published March 1992 to June 1992.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Irons (March 1992) | ☐ Microwave ovens (June 1992) |
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| ☐ Clothes dryers (March 1992) | ☐ Orbital sanders (June 1992). |
| ☐ Unflued gas heaters (April 1992) | |

These are products we bought for testing (we never take manufacturers' samples), so you won't be the first to turn them on or set them up. But we'll cover any service problems with a CHOICE warranty that'll match the manufacturers' — just as if you'd bought them new.

All new CHOICE subscriptions and renewals received from members and personal subscribers (including donors of gift subscriptions) by 31 December will go into the Draw, unless of course you indicate you don't want to be included.

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USE THE ORDER FORM OVERLEAF

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 - 7 Prizes cannot be taken as cash.
 - 8 South Australian residents may enter the draw by completing the form and posting to Reply Paid No. 13, Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204, without subscribing to the magazine. Only one entry per person is permissible through this method.
 - 9 Last date for receipt of entries to the Draw is 31 December, 1992. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
 - 10 The draw will be conducted at the office of the Australian Consumers' Association at 10 am on 4 January, 1993.
 - 11 The winner will be notified by letter and published in the March 1993 issue of CHOICE magazine.
 - 12 The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204.
- NSW Permit No. TC92/3045, VIC Raffles & Bingo Permits Board Permit No. 92/1775 issued on 20/7/92, ACT Permit No. TP92/1109 issued under the Lotteries Ordinance, NT No. NT92/0932.

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CHOICE LINES



Consumer Rights Advice

CHOICE operates consumer rights lines for people having problems with a faulty product or a dispute with a service person. The lines set out what your basic rights are and what steps you can take to protect them. These lines are also available in four languages other than English — Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese and Turkish.

CHOICE Consumer Rights Advice:

0055 200
Advice in Vietnamese: 0055 200
Advice in Turkish: 0055 200
Advice in Chinese: 0055 200
Advice in Arabic: 0055 200

Youth lines

A line specifically for young consumers, the 'Ripped-off' Line, outlines your shopping rights as well as letting you know what you can do if you run into problems with something you have bought.

Students can also call a resource line to find out where to get up-to-date information on the consumer movement and the environment. These two topics are most requested by students and teachers who request our Consumer Information Service.

CHOICE 'Ripped-off' Line — Advice
Young Consumers: 0055 200
CHOICE Student Resource Guide: 0055 200

Product advice

A number of product lines also summarise what to look for when you are buying a particular product. Brand-name recommendations aren't included, however — they remain exclusive to CHOICE subscribers.

CHOICE Washing Machine Advice:

0055 200
CHOICE Water Filter Advice: 0055 200

CHOICE Baby Products Advice:

0055 200
CHOICE Safer Domestic Pest Control Advice: 0055 200

Other lines

A media 'hotline' provides immediate and accurate background information on consumer issues being reported in the media, while a 'suggestion line' gives you a chance to say what you would like to see tested or researched for publication in CHOICE.

CHOICE Media 'Hotline': 0055 200
CHOICE Suggestion Line: 0055 200

NOTEBOOK COMPUTERS

Small, portable, even 'sexy' ... but how powerful are they?

We tested seven notebooks to find out their strengths and limitations.

COMPUTER TALK

WE'VE TRIED to keep this report as simple as possible — it's not been written for boffins! — but it's virtually impossible to discuss computers without using some jargon. If you're a complete novice you might like to look up *Buying your first computer*, in the November 1990 issue of CHOICE, which discusses how to work out what you need in a computer and explains a lot of computer terms. If you haven't already decided between IBM-compatibles and **APPLE Macintosh**, see our computer test report in the August 1991 issue, where we discussed the differences between them. Below we give a quick definition of the jargon used in this article.

■ **386SX and 386SL**. These are names for certain types of IBM-compatible computers which indicate how powerful and fast they are (the names are based on the 80386 processor, versions of which are the heart of these computers). 386SXs and 386SLs are a lot faster than the older XTs and ATs and have more memory. There are even faster notebooks available, known as 486s. The difference between a 386SL and a 386SX is that the SL uses less battery power. 'SL' stands for sleep: the SL is optimised in design for operation in a battery-powered computer.

■ **HARD DISK SIZE**. The hard disk is where the programs you use and the data you enter into the computer are stored. Its size (like RAM's) is expressed in bytes — a byte is a unit of memory capacity, and normally stores one character. A megabyte (Mb or M) stores around a million characters.

■ **RANDOM ACCESS MEMORY — RAM**. RAM is the workplace of the computer, where programs are run. The more RAM you have, the larger the programs you can run and the more programs you can run at the same time (within the limits of your system).

■ **VGA MONITOR**. Video graphics array monitor, which gives you the widest range of colours and usually the best resolution of colour monitors for IBM-compatibles.

NOTEBOOKS are the latest thing in personal computers. They're compact — literally about the size of an A4 book — and don't weigh much more than a small bag of groceries. They're designed to be portable and can run on batteries as well as mains power. They appeal to those looking for an alternative to bulky desktop machines taking up precious space at home as well as to people who take work home or on the road.

The portable segment of the computer market has really taken off in the last 12 months. Prices have tumbled — the average price of those we tested was around \$3500 — and the technology has improved. Notebooks are fast and powerful enough to run serious software and small enough to carry easily. They've all but driven the larger, heavier laptop machines (earlier versions of the portable computer) out of the market.

Like desktops, notebook computers come in many different configurations — memory capacity, processing speed, hard disk size, etc. We tested a range of prominent brands — six IBM-compatibles and an Apple — at the cheapest end of the market. The IBM-compatibles were either 386SX or 386SL types. All had monochrome screens and a hard disk size of 40, 60 or 80 megabytes (Mb). All can have their memory capacity (RAM) increased if you need it, and have an internal rechargeable battery with an external recharger. (If you don't know what some of the terms used in this paragraph mean, see *Computer talk*, left, and the table notes on page 37.)

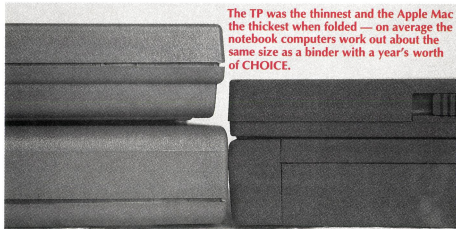
Notebooks do have some limitations, however. Obviously the screen and keyboard are smaller than those of a desktop computer (discussed later). And when using battery power, the operating time is limited by the amount of charge the battery holds. There is also less flexibility to expand the computer. Notebooks aren't designed to do everything a desktop can do — for the convenience of their small size you trade off some of the capacity to expand the computer for specialised uses.

BATTERY RUNNING TIME

The operating time you get out of a particular model compared to another depends largely on the size and quality of the battery supplied with it. Our tests found significant differences between them — the fully charged batteries of the notebooks we tested provided from one to four hours' continuous use. The one with the shortest battery running time was the lightest to lug around (the TP); which factor is more important depends on how you use a computer. For all models, you can buy an extra battery pack to extend the length of time they can be used away from a mains power supply.

Most notebooks, and all the models we tested, have some built-in energy-saving features which will extend this time (they can be set so the hard disk and screen lighting turn off if the computer hasn't been used for a certain time, for example). Different usage patterns and how high the screen brightness is set will also affect power consumption.

The TP was the thinnest and the Apple Mac the thickest when folded — on average the notebook computers work out about the same size as a binder with a year's worth of CHOICE.



SCREENS

The screens of the notebook computers we tested were monochrome liquid crystal displays. Notebooks are available with colour screens but, although they've come down a lot in price in the last year, they still cost several thousand dollars more than monochrome.

There were noticeable differences between the screens, mainly in size, hue and the range of brightness/contrast settings. We had a panel of computer users assess and rate each of them, and while one of the screens (the COMPAQ) was given consistently high scores by all members of the panel, each of the others received a wide range of scores. Even the AMSTRAD screen, which was significantly smaller than the others, and had a distinct blue/green tinge which reduced the level of contrast able to be obtained, was considered very good by one panellist, very poor by another, and was given a range of scores in between by the others.

As this indicates, whether a screen is perceived as good or bad is largely a matter of personal preference. For this reason we haven't rated the screens: the best advice we can give is to look at the screen before you buy a notebook, play around with the brightness and contrast, and see if you like it.

KEYBOARDS

The same is true of the keyboards, and we haven't scored them either. Again, the models in our test differed significantly in the feel and layout of their keyboard. Key feel is very subjective, so trying before you buy is the only way you'll know whether you think a keyboard feels too stiff, too sloppy or just right.

The layout of the keyboard, however, is less a matter of personal preference. On the notebooks we tested, the size and layout of the letter and number keys was standard, but that of some of the function keys and the cursor control keys — the arrows, page up, page down, end and home keys, for example — was compromised in most cases.

On one model (the SAMSUNG) these keys were very small. On most of the others, some of the function keys were 'shifted' keys: each had two functions (like the number and symbol keys at the top of most keyboards), so to get one of these functions you had to press the shift key at the same time. How annoying this is to you depends partly on what software you use. Different packages make use of different function keys more often. For example, the F11 and F12 keys are used a lot in Framework but rarely in Word — a machine where these are shifted keys would probably be a pain

PROFILES

Computers are listed in descending order of battery running time. Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992.

ZENITH Z-NOTE 320Lb

Price: \$4495/\$4596

Good points

- Longest battery running time.
 - Full set of full-sized cursor keys (insert, delete, home, end, page up, page down and arrows).
 - Can run its own screen plus an external VGA monitor simultaneously.
 - Password protection.
- #### Bad points
- No carry case provided.
 - No legs to tilt the keyboard.

COMPAQ CONTURA 3/20

Price: \$2450/\$3150

Good points

- One of the longest battery running times.
 - Screen was slightly better than all the other IBM-compatibles and received consistently high scores from user panel.
 - Has dedicated keys for insert, delete, home, end, page up, page down and arrows — but they are not in the usual spot, so may take some getting used to.
 - Password protection.
- #### Bad points
- No carry case provided.
 - Need to use shift key to use F11 and F12 keys.
 - Cursor control keys less conveniently placed — see above.
 - No legs to tilt the keyboard.

APPLE MACINTOSH POWERBOOK 140

Price: \$3995/\$4500

Good points

- One of the longest battery running times.
 - Built-in trackball (similar to a mouse).
 - Has adjustable legs to provide keyboard tilt.
 - Clear, bright screen.
 - Comes with microphone to digitally record and store sounds through the sound port, and has a sound output port, which some people may find useful.
 - Can read from and write to 3.5 inch disks in MS-DOS format, which allows transfer of files from IBM-compatible machines.
- #### Bad points
- No carry case provided.
 - Was the thickest when folded.
 - No password protection.
 - No external monitor port.
 - Hard disk operations were slow compared to the IBM-compatibles, and slower than on the APPLE Classic tested last time.



ZENITH Z-NOTE 320Lb

AMSTRAD ANB-386SX40

Price: \$1999/\$3499

Good points

- Nothing in particular.

Bad points

- The heaviest of those we tested.
- Smallest screen, which lacked brightness and had a blue/green tinge.
- No carry case (soft wallet without handle provided).
- Need to use shift key to use page up, page down, home and end keys.
- No password protection.
- No legs to tilt the keyboard.
- Has a couple of quirks when running Windows: the keys for adjusting screen display and energy-saving features don't operate correctly, and using the suspend/resume feature can cause system date errors.

RENARD XTRA PRO X300

Price: \$2680/\$3480

Good points

- Good processing and hard disk speed.
- Full set of cursor keys (though not all are full-sized).
- Can run its own screen and an external VGA monitor at the same time.
- The second serial port is housed in a

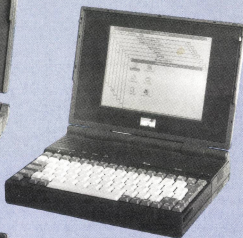
COMPAQ CONTURA 3/20



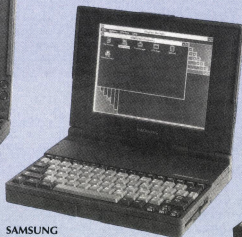
APPLE MACINTOSH POWERBOOK 140



AMSTRAD ANB-386SX40



NARD XTRA PRO X300



SAMSUNG
NOTEMASTER 386S/25



TP NBC386SX

removable module, which can be replaced with a trackball, modem or Ethernet connector.

- Password protection.
- Has a SCSI port (a standard connection socket on APPLES) so you can connect SCSI devices such as an external hard disk and scanner.

Bad points

- No carry case provided.
- No legs to tilt the keyboard.
- Has a quirk when running Windows: the keys for adjusting screen display don't operate correctly.

SAMSUNG NOTEMASTER 386S/25

Price: \$3003/\$3735

Good points

- Good processing and hard disk speed.
- Good carry case provided, but it doesn't fit the power supply too.

- Has a special battery pack to allow you to run the computer on eight AA alkaline batteries in an emergency (gives about an hour's use).

- Also has an optional extra internal battery pack to supplement the NiCad battery. It fits in place of a modem, and provides around an hour of additional use.

- Has removable hard disk unit.

Bad points

- Shorter battery operating time (without the special battery pack).
- Need to use the shift key to use the home, end, page up, page down, F11 and F12 keys.

- Some function keys are very small.

- No password protection.

- No legs to tilt the keyboard.

TP NBC386SX

Price: \$2795/\$3500

Good points

- Good processing and hard disk speed.
- The slimmest and lightest unit.
- Good carry case with shoulder strap provided. Has two separate parts for computer and power supply, which can be used together or individually.
- Built-in trackball (similar to a mouse).
- Full set of cursor keys: page up, page down, home, end and arrow keys.

Bad points

- Short battery operating time.
- Need to use shift key to use F11 and F12.
- No password protection.
- No legs to tilt the keyboard.
- Has a quirk when running Windows: the keys for adjusting screen display don't operate correctly, but you can work around this.

NOTEBOOK COMPUTERS

Brand/model (in order of battery running time)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Warranty (years)	Price (\$)*	Replacement battery price (\$)*	Computer weight (kg)	Power supply weight (kg)	Dimensions (folded, mm, HxWxD)	Screen size (mm, HxW)
ZENITH Z-Note 320Lb	Zenith Data	Japan	1	4495/4596	349	2.6	0.7	50 x 305 x 220	144 x
COMPAQ Contura 3/20	Compaq	Singapore	1	2450/3150	100/245	2.8	0.6	50 x 300 x 230	144 x
APPLE Macintosh PowerBook 140 (A)	Apple	USA	1	3995/4500	115	3.0	0.3	60 x 285 x 235	132 x
AMSTRAD ANB-386SX40	Amstrad	Korea	1	1999/3499	98/150	3.4	0.7	55 x 280 x 215	129 x
RENARD XtraPro X300	Veridata	Taiwan	2	2680/3480	180/209	2.8	0.7	50 x 300 x 220	144 x
SAMSUNG NoteMaster 386S/25	Samsung	Korea	1	3003/3735	148/160	2.7	0.6	50 x 280 x 220	144 x
TP NBC386SX	Total Peripherals	Taiwan	1	2795/3500	110/268	2.3	0.7	45 x 285 x 220	144 x

* Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992. (A) Has been replaced by PowerBook 145 but 140 should still be available at some retailers.
(B) Second serial port can be replaced with a trackball. na not applicable — you can't run this program on an Apple.

for a Framework user but not a problem if you use Word.

Two models, however — the ZENITH and RENARD — had dedicated keys for all the functions, which is much more convenient. Only on the ZENITH were they full-sized. See the profiles for more details.

SPEED

All the models in our test were fast. The IBM-compatible models (that is, all but the APPLE) were around one and a half times faster at processing information than the desktop models in our last computer test (August 1991). They also have a more modern processor design (the 80386 processor), which means they are capable of running more powerful software.

* The APPLE in this test is a lot faster — two to three times faster — than the APPLE Classic we tested last time. It also has a much more powerful processor (the 68030) than the older APPLE.

Taking into account that they were using different software packages, the tests we conducted found the APPLE and IBM-compatible notebooks were comparable for processing speed. The differences between the IBM-compatible machines weren't great either, and all were fast. See the table for speed scores and table notes for details about how we tested for processing speed.

We also tested hard disk speed. Most of the IBM-compatibles performed similarly in the disk speed tests, and were around 50% faster than those in our last test. The AMSTRAD was significantly slower, as was the APPLE, which took around twice as long as most of the IBM-compatibles to perform the same operations. Disk speed will not be equally important for all users. If you plan to run Windows — software for IBM compatibles which allows you to use several programs at the same time and which involves a lot of use of the hard disk

— the speed differences may be more important to you.

CONCLUSION

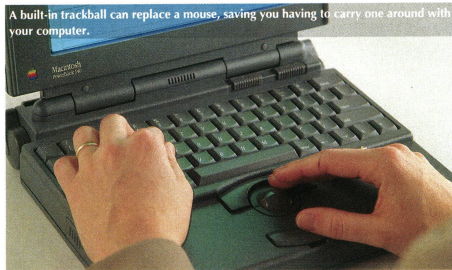
Notebook computers certainly perform as well as desktop computers. On the other hand, while in general they are reasonable to use, they are not as easy as desktops. To make them as small and compact as they are, some compromises have been made with the screens and, in most cases, the keyboards. (They can all be plugged into a normal keyboard and all but the APPLE into a colour monitor, however.)

There are significant differences between the models we tested. Individual notebooks have different strengths and weaknesses, so which one is best for you depends on how you want to use a notebook — see *What to buy* for our general recommendations. The table lists them in order of battery running time, but this is not an overall ranking. Read the profiles for details of the pros and cons of individual models, and the table for information about features and how we tested.

WHAT TO BUY

Brand/model	Price (\$)*
FOR LONGEST BATTERY RUNNING TIME	
ZENITH Z-Note 320Lb	4495/4596
COMPAQ Contura 3/20	2450/3150
APPLE Macintosh Powerbook 140	3995/4500
FOR BEST PORTABILITY	
TP NBC386SX	2795/3500
SAMSUNG NoteMaster 386S/25	3003/3735
FOR BEST DISK AND PROCESSING SPEED	
RENARD XtraPro X300	2680/3480
SAMSUNG NoteMaster 386S/25	3003/3735
TP NBC386SX	2795/3500

* Prices shown are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in October 1992.



A built-in trackball can replace a mouse, saving you having to carry one around with your computer.

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
filled/max)	Hard disk (Mb)	Internal modem available	Built-in trackball	Password protection	'Landmark' speed (MHz)	Processing speed score (%)	Disk speed score (%)	Battery running time (hours)	Brand/model (in order of battery running time)
12	60	✓		✓	20	64	80	3.7	ZENITH Z-Note 320Lb
10	40	✓			20	62	75	3.0	COMPAQ Contura 3/20
8	40	✓	✓		na	67	34	2.7	APPLE Macintosh PowerBook 140
5	40	✓			23	68	67	2.4	AMSTRAD ANB-386SX40
8	60	✓	(B)	✓	23	80	82	2.3	RENARD XtraPro X300
8	60	✓			24	79	81	1.7	SAMSUNG NoteMaster 386S/25
8	80	✓	✓		27	85	74	1.5	TP NBC386SX

1 MEMORY — RAM

Two megabytes is plenty to run most word processing and spreadsheet programs. If you want to run several programs at once, either on the **APPLE** or using Windows on the IBM-compatibles, you might want more memory: it's possible to expand these models by adding extra memory chips, though this can be costly. (See *Computer talk* for an explanation of what RAM is.)

2 HARD DISK

Forty megabytes of hard disk space is generally sufficient for using word processing, spreadsheet and database software packages. If you plan to add more packages, however (such as graphics and games), you might need a larger hard disk. It's possible to buy these models with a larger disk, but this will add to the cost.

3 INTERNAL MODEM AVAILABLE

None of these computers comes with a built-in modem, but all have a space where one can be fitted inside the computer. (A modem is a device which allows you to transfer data from one computer to another via a telephone line.)

4 BUILT-IN TRACKBALL

You can plug a mouse into all the models we tested, but some also came with a built-in trackball, which performs a similar function. This is an advantage if you like using a mouse or run Windows and often cart the notebook around, as it saves you having to pack the mouse too.

5 PASSWORD PROTECTION

Computers with this feature can be set up so the user has to type in a password before they can be used. This helps stop anyone using the machine or getting access to the data in its memory if it is stolen or lost. It provides some security for confidential data, but isn't absolutely tamperproof.

6 'LANDMARK' SPEED

A computer's 'Landmark' speed is often quoted in ads and magazines (as '24 MHz Landmark' or '24 MHz LM', for example). It is a public domain test program for IBM-compatible machines which allows you to compare the speed of one model with another. We used version 2.00. (For those who are interested, 'Landmark' speed is expressed in megahertz — a unit of frequency — and relates to the original IBM/AT computer, which runs at 6 MHz. A computer with a 'Landmark' speed of 18 MHz, for example, is three times faster than the original IBM. Don't confuse this with the actual clock speed of the computer — also measured in MHz — which indicates the number of operations the computer's central processor can perform in a second.)

7 PROCESSING SPEED SCORE

To test processing speed we ran two tests, using two different software packages for each test. This gave us four results for each computer, which were averaged to give its final score.

For the first test, we timed how long it took each computer to process the monthly balances for five different home loans over 25 years on a very large spreadsheet. It involved working out 1500 balances, each of which required at least five different calculations. (We used the Lotus 123 and Microsoft Works for Windows spreadsheet programs with the IBM-compatibles, and Lotus 123 for Macintosh and Microsoft Excel for Macintosh for the **APPLE**.)

For the second test, we measured how long it took each computer to search for and replace a word which occurred 1000 times in a 5000-word document, using word processing software. (We used Microsoft Word 5 and Microsoft Word for Windows with the IBM-compatible machines, and Claris Works and Microsoft Word for Macintosh with the **APPLE**.)

The results for the **APPLE** can't be directly compared with the IBM-compatibles, because they use different programs. However, it's fair to say we were able to perform similar operations on the **APPLE** and the IBM-compatibles in similar times using comparable software.

8 DISK SPEED SCORE

We used two tests to determine the hard disk speed. We timed how long each took to duplicate 24 identical files (each containing 22 pages of text) on the hard disk, and how long to duplicate a single very large file (one megabyte, or 350 pages of text). Unlike the processing speed tests, the hard disk speed tests don't involve any software packages. They were done using the computer's operating system — MS-DOS for the IBM-compatibles and System 7 for the **APPLE**. (Note: the **RENARD** came installed with DR-DOS but we replaced this with MS-DOS and tested it using this system so its results could be compared with the other IBM-compatibles. It performed better using MS-DOS. It would be easy to install this system if you wanted to.)

9 BATTERY RUNNING TIME

We compared how long you could use each computer on battery power by measuring the length of time they could run a program simulating constant use with intermittent file saving until the battery ran out of charge.

The energy-saving features of the computers were set so that the hard disk was turned off after two minutes of no disk activity and the screen backlighting remained on all the time. Screen brightness was set to the same level (using a light meter) on all of them except the **TP**, which could not be set as low as the other models.

Our results give the actual time the batteries last for one particular pattern of use only, but they do indicate how the models compare to each other for battery life.

FROZEN DESSERTS

Are the new frozen desserts better for you than helpings of regular ice cream?

HEALTH-CONSCIOUS consumers can now choose from a wide range of frozen desserts beyond standard and premium ice creams: low-fat ice cream, reduced-fat ice cream, ice confections, gelato, VITARI and tofu ice confections.

Many products carry special claims: "low-cholesterol", "low-fat", "polyunsaturated" and "carbohydrate-modified". But is one type really better for you than another?

We bought as many frozen desserts with a 'healthy' image as we could find, finishing up with 24 products which we tested for fat, kilojoules and sugar content. The results are listed in the table on page 41, and *What's in a name* below explains the differences between the different types of dessert.

Additionally we commissioned the Food Industry Development Centre at the University of NSW to conduct a taste test on our behalf and assess each dessert for sweetness, smoothness, texture and overall liking. A product may be low in kilojoules but just as low on taste-appeal. Between the taste panel and our laboratory tests we managed to come up with a clear winner for health-conscious ice-dessert lovers.

NOT THE REAL THING?

You probably won't find low-fat desserts as satisfying as standard or premium ice cream — it's the fat in foods which gives you that nice contented feeling.

None of those tested was particularly high in kilojoules, and all could be recommended as desserts for occasional consumption, but so can regular ice cream for most people. In most cases, the kilojoules you save by switching to a reduced-fat ice cream aren't very significant.

On the other hand, if you're interested in reducing the amount of fat you eat there can be quite a saving in going from regular to a reduced or low-fat ice cream — and an enormous saving if you change to eating water-based gelato instead of milk-based ice cream type desserts.

There's a great variation in the price of these desserts, with **CHARIOTO Gourmet sorbet gelato** being the most expensive at 87 cents a serve (two scoops) at the price we paid, followed by **VITARI**, **KONEYS Tofu**, and **TOFU DELITE**. All the others cost us less than 50 cents per serve.

A MATTER OF TASTE

From the taste test it seems most of the panellists preferred an ice cream dessert to anything else. **Gelato** — a water, fruit juice and sugar-based product — ranked poorly in the taste stakes, along with **VITARI**, a dessert made from pulped and whipped fresh fruit.

The most-liked dessert was **OAK Classic Light** reduced-fat ice cream, followed by **WEIGHT WATCHERS Delight** and **NORCO Low-cholesterol frozen dessert**.

Least-liked overall was **PETERS Nice 'n Lite (WA)** — nearly half the tasters disliked it. The table lists the full taste test results.

TRYING TO LOSE WEIGHT?

If you're trying to lose weight, don't eat dessert unless it's a piece of fresh fruit! Most processed desserts are relatively high in fat and/or sugar. But if you can't resist, at least pick one which is low in kilojoules — we found this usually means the lowest in fat. (The table lists the products in order from lowest to highest fat content.)

If you're watching your weight, the best choice is: **STREETS CAL-CONTROL Vanilla ice confection**, with 222 kJ (55 calories) per two-scoop serve (it comes in individually wrapped serves, so there's less chance of being tempted to give yourself an extra-



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

EACH of the desserts we tested fell into one of the following categories — and all passed that category's requirements under regulation.

■ **Low-fat ice cream** must contain not more than 4% total fat, which must be derived from milk. (This can be cream, butter or dehydrated milk fat.)

■ **Reduced-fat ice cream** must contain not more than 6.5% total fat — again derived from milk.

■ **Regular ice cream** must contain at least 10% milk fat.

■ **Frozen confection** must contain at least 8% fat — not necessarily milk fat. This is the main difference between an ice cream and a confection. However, that doesn't mean it's better for you. Palm and coconut oils, although vegetable oils, are mainly saturated fats.

This category description is rarely used

these days, many manufacturers preferring to market their products as 'ice confection'. However, two of the products we tested are labelled as 'frozen confection'. All frozen confections may be labelled 'ice confection', but not vice versa.

■ **Ice confection** is not covered by regulations as to the amount of fat it must or may contain. It is simply said to be "a frozen product prepared from water or foods, or water and foods". Basically, all the products we tested which are not low or reduced-fat ice cream or frozen yoghurt can be included in this category, including the tofu ice confections, gelati and **VITARI**.

■ **Gelato** is a water and sugar-based product, with low to no fat. Other ingredients are fruit juice and maybe real fruit. Commercial gelato normally contains vegetable gums (the chocolate one we tested also contains an emulsifier). It can also contain skim milk, unsalted butter and cocoa.

■ **VITARI** is not a class type, it's the brand

large helping). Other possibilities are CHARIOTO Gourmet sorbet gelato — 228 kJ (57 calories); PETERS Nice 'n Lite (WA) — 238 kJ (59 calories), but one of the least-liked; and DAIRY BELL Lite — 254 kJ (62 calories) and another that was well-liked in the taste test.

Despite the 'healthy' image of tofu and yoghurt generally, CHARIOTO Tofu Gourmet, KONEYS Tofu, and SKI Soft-serve soft-frozen yoghurt were higher in kilojoules than standard ice cream.

CHARIOTO Cream reduced-fat ice cream and OAK Classic low-cholesterol frozen dessert also contained more kilojoules per serve than standard ice cream — even though they were lower in fat. This is because they contain less air and therefore more ice cream in each serve.

Super-premium ice creams such as NORGEN VAAZ, BASKIN ROBBINS and PLUMES are definitely not recommended if you're trying to lose weight. A serve of each has around the same number of kilojoules as a Mars bar.

LOWERING YOUR CHOLESTEROL?

One of the keys to reducing your blood cholesterol is to eat less fat — especially saturated fats. Any dessert with as much fat as standard ice cream should only be eaten occasionally.

So claims such as 'low-cholesterol' and 'polyunsaturated' can be misleading if the product still has a high fat content. For example, OAK Classic Low-cholesterol frozen dessert — although low in cholesterol because it contains vegetable oil instead of dairy fat — contained the second-highest amount of fat per serve of the 24 products we tested. A similar case is NORCO Low-cholesterol frozen dessert, which also contained more fat per serve than that found in most 'reduced-fat' ice cream.

Despite their healthy-sounding names, TOFU Delite, SKI Soft-serve soft-frozen yoghurt and CHARIOTO Cream Reduced-fat ice cream were also relatively high in fat, and in all cases the fat was predominantly the saturated variety: not good choices for those concerned about cholesterol.

If you want to eat frozen desserts and work on reducing your cholesterol level, choose from those which are low in fat: water-based gelato, VITARI, STREETS Cal-control, PETERS Light, PETERS Nice 'n Lite (WA). The taste test results in the table should give you an idea of which you might like.

IF YOU WANT TO RESTRICT YOUR SUGAR INTAKE ...

Some of the frozen desserts we tested are really high in sugar. These include SKI Soft-serve soft-frozen yoghurt as well as all the gelato products. VITARI is also high in sugar, although this is not added sugar, but comes from the fruit and fruit juices used in the product. Sugar is needed in ice creams not only for sweetness, but also to enhance other flavours, because freezing lowers flavour levels in food.

Some products are marketed to appeal to people with diabetes. Diabetes Australia says it usually recommends PETERS Light, DAIRY BELL Lite or WEIGHT WATCHERS Delight, rather than products like PETERS Carbohydrate-modified ice cream. The main difference between this product and the others is that half of its sugar is in the form of sorbitol. Sorbitol has the same amount of kilojoules as other sugars, but is absorbed from the intestine more slowly and is therefore tolerated by people with diabetes. (Although if you're the sort of person who eats a whole carton of ice cream while watching a movie, don't buy this product — sorbitol has a laxative effect when eaten in larger than normal quantities.)

Apart from the use of sorbitol instead of regular sugar, this product is similar to regular ice cream. It is more than 10% fat, and has a similar calorie content.

Diabetes Australia does not believe this product has any benefit over regular ice cream because many diabetics are on a weight reduction/low kilojoule diet as the main form of control. Therefore it's more important for them to reduce the amount of kilojoules in their diet than replace sugar with what is simply another form of sugar.

ALLERGIC TO MILK?

People who are allergic to milk need to choose non-dairy desserts. These include gelati (although the one we tested with chocolate in it contains skim milk), VITARI and the soy-based (tofu) frozen desserts.

All the tofu ice confections we tested claimed to be 'dairy-free', or 'non-dairy'. They make this claim on the basis of being made from soy protein or soy bean curd (tofu) instead of milk solids. This doesn't mean their fat content is necessarily lower; TOFU DELITE and CHARIOTO Tofu Gourmet had about as much fat as regular ice cream.

Some tofu products were claimed to be "cholesterol-free" and "low-cholesterol", but



name of a frozen fruit product in a category of its own. The one we tested was strawberry flavoured, but according to the ingredients list the ingredient present in the largest amount is apple concentrate; strawberry puree is listed only second. It's advertised as having the creaminess of ice cream with no cholesterol, fat or lactose; the creaminess is mimicked by using vegetable gums (and is probably also related to the whipping process).

■ **Tofu ice confections** don't contain any dairy products — that is, no milk fat or non-fat milk solids. Instead they are made from vegetable oil (coconut or palm oil in the ones we tested) and instead of milk solids they contain soy protein or soy bean extract (which, as well as protein, will contain small amounts of fat and sugar). Apart from these ingredients they are similar to other ice creams and ice confection in that they contain emulsifiers, vegetable gums, colour and flavour.

■ **Frozen yoghurt** is basically made the same way as regular yoghurt, except it tastes more like a dessert. Regular yoghurt must contain not less than 3% milk fat, regular fruit yoghurt not less than 2%.

The frozen yoghurt we tested was higher in fat and much higher in sugar and kilojoules than most regular yoghurts (6% fat, 26% sugar). If you're interested in live bacteria culture, frozen yoghurt will not have as many active bacteria as regular yoghurt.

Other ingredients present in frozen yoghurt, besides milk, include sugar, vegetable gums, thickener, emulsifiers and fruit.

■ **'Light'** can mean anything — light in colour, texture, flavour, fat, salt. In the case of 'light ice cream' it seems to refer to the reduced-fat content when compared with regular ice cream. The use of the word isn't regulated and in real terms it's pretty meaningless.

FROZEN DESSERTS — FROM LOWEST TO HIGHEST FAT CONTENT

1

Brand/type (flavour – vanilla unless otherwise stated)	Category	Size purchased (L)	Price paid (\$)	Weight of serving (two scoops –)
CHARIOTO Gourmet sorbet gelato (strawberry)	Ice confection	520 mL	4.50	60
TARANTOS Gelato Classico (strawberry and lemon)	Ice confection	1.5	5.49	65
VITARI (strawberry)	Fruit ice confection	135 mL	1.04	61
PETERS Nice 'n Lite (WA)	Ice confection	1.5	2.45	56
STREETS Cal-Control vanilla ice confection	Ice confection	2	5.19	44
PETERS Light	Low-fat ice cream	2	3.54	49
TARANTOS Gelato Classico (choc and lemon)	Ice confection	1.5	5.49	68
KONEYS Tofu	Tofu ice confection	1	4.50	64
DAIRY BELL Lite	Ice confection	2	3.99	48
PETERS Light Reduced-fat ice cream (WA)	Reduced-fat ice cream	2	3.17	50
DAIRY BELL Reduced-fat ice cream	Reduced-fat ice cream	2	2.74	46
OAK Classic Light	Reduced-fat ice cream	2	3.29	47
TOFFAIT	Tofu ice confection	1	2.92	50
WEIGHT WATCHERS Delight	Ice confection	1.5	2.98	55
STREETS Blue Ribbon Light	Reduced-fat ice cream	2	3.98	48
SNOW STAR Light Reduced-fat ice cream	Reduced-fat ice cream	2	3.49	53
NORCO Low-cholesterol frozen dessert	Frozen confection	2	3.99	45
SNOW BOY Polyunsaturated ice confection	Ice confection	2	3.19	41
SKI Soft-serve, soft-frozen yoghurt (strawberry)	Frozen yoghurt	1	3.11	71
CHARIOTO Cream	Reduced-fat ice cream	520 mL	4.00	68
TOFU DELITE Dairy-free frozen dessert	Tofu ice confection	1	4.50	47
Standard ice cream	Ice cream	Not applicable (A)	Not applicable (A)	47
PETERS Carbohydrate-modified vanilla ice cream	CHO-modified ice cream	1.5	3.02	52
OAK Classic Low-cholesterol frozen dessert	Frozen confection	2	3.89	49
CHARIOTO Tofu Gourmet	Tofu ice confection	750 mL	3.40	67
Super-premium ice cream	Ice cream	Not applicable (A)	Not applicable (A)	90

(A) We took the information for standard and premium ice cream from *Ice cream and related products in the Australian diet*, The Australian Nutrition Foundation, 1988. They were not part of the taste test.

our tests showed that almost all the fat they contained was saturated. We found high lauric acid levels, which means all the tofu products contained large amounts of either coconut or palm oil — both of which contain a large proportion of saturated fats.

AND THE WINNERS ARE ...

■ **Best-liked and overall winner:** OAK Classic Light. As well as topping the taste test, this dessert contained about half the fat content of standard ice cream, and only 314 kilojoules (77 calories) per two scoops.

■ **Lowest in fat:** VITARI and the two fruit-flavoured gelati won this category — but all were comparatively high in sugar. The two gelati are: CHARIOTO Gourmet sorbet gelato (strawberry) and TARANTOS Gelato Classico (strawberry and lemon). All three desserts contained only traces of fat. The choc and lemon-flavoured TARANTOS gelato had more fat (it contained unsalted butter).

■ **Lowest in kilojoules:** STREETS Cal-Control vanilla ice confection, with 222 kJ (55 calories) per two scoops. Unfortunately most of the taste panellists rated it as 'mediocre'.



Oak Classic Light was the overall winner — as well as topping the taste test it contained only half the fat of standard ice cream, and was one of the lowest in kilojoules. *And the winners are, left, gives details of the other top-rating desserts pictured here.*

CORDLESS TELEPHONES

Are they as reliable as ordinary phones? Do cheap ones perform as well as the dearer ones? We answer these and other questions.

THEY'RE THE sort of thing you can live without, but if you had a cordless phone you'd probably find it very handy. If you need an extension phone, a cordless model is worth considering. Their main advantage is portability. If you're expecting an important call, you don't have to hang around within earshot of the phone all day — you can take the handset with you while you dig the garden, soak in a hot bath or work in the garage.

You can move around while you're talking on the phone, or take it to your favourite comfy chair. This is particularly handy for people with young children: you can keep an eye on them in the backyard or stop them smearing peanut butter on the walls without having to put down the phone.

For elderly, ill or disabled people, if you have trouble moving fast or are confined to bed, you can take the phone to whatever room you're in. Some are small enough to

fit in a pocket, so can be kept with you all the time.

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Cordless telephones aren't the same as mobile or cellular phones. They are a lot cheaper and, unlike these, they operate on normal Telecom lines, and calls are charged at standard Telecom rates. They're also different from ordinary phones: although the base needs to be plugged into a phone

PROFILES

Models shown in rank order. Prices are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in September 1992.



PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS



SHIMATSU F-7220-AUS



SHIMATSU F-7102-AUS



PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS



SUPERFONE CT-1000AUS

PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS

Price: \$345/\$449

Good points

- A high scorer for performance and the top for convenience.
- Most compact design: handset folds in half and fits in a shirt pocket.
- Spare battery always on charge in base.
- Has many features.
- Designed so it's not possible to put handset in base the wrong way (which would prevent it recharging).

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.

PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS

Price: \$229/\$319

Good points

- A high scorer for convenience and equal top scorer for performance.
- Works well at a range of 200 metres.
- Has many features.

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.

SHIMATSU F-7220-AUS

Price: \$179/\$200

Good points

- High scorer for both performance and convenience.
- Has many features.

Bad points

- First two we bought were faulty.

SHIMATSU F-7102-AUS

Price: \$180

Good points

- High scorer for both convenience and performance.
- Has many features.

Bad points

- Nothing in particular.

socket, the handset — which does the ringing and dialling as well as lets you listen and speak — isn't attached to the base. So you can make and receive calls with the handset while you're some distance from the base.

Cordless phones use two-way radio waves to link the handset and base. There are 10 radio channels with specific frequencies for cordless phones, and individual phones are programmed during manufacture to work on one or two of them. This radio link runs on electricity and battery power — the base must be connected to a power point as well as a phone socket and the handset contains rechargeable batteries. A cheap double-adaptor switch (around \$10) will allow you to plug the base into the same connection as your main phone.

Security codes prevent someone operating on the same channel from using your phone line to make calls (but not from

listening in). All models have to have at least one security coding system built into them to be sold in Australia, so it's virtually impossible for another cordless phone to make a call on your line (and your bill!).

WHAT ARE THEIR LIMITATIONS?

■ They only work while you're within the operating range of the phone's base. The models we tested claimed maximum ranges from 150 to 250 metres, but we found around 125 metres is a more realistic average maximum range. The actual range in your home will depend on what is between the handset and base — factors like the layout of the surroundings and nearby equipment can affect it.

■ Because they require both mains power and batteries it's not a good idea to rely on a cordless phone as your only phone. It won't operate if there's a blackout, or if the batteries for the handset are flat.

■ You have to remember to keep the batteries charged, and replace them when they wear out. Usually, the handset needs to be placed on the base for recharging.

■ In some conditions, you can get interference problems. Nearby electrical equipment, other cordless phones operating on the same channel, motors, fluorescent light fittings, high-frequency equipment and faulty electrical equipment, for example, can interfere with the radio link so you lose calls or hear background voices or static hiss. This is more likely to happen in built-up and densely populated areas.

■ Phantom calls are another nuisance. If a neighbour within a radius of 200 metres or so has a cordless phone operating on the same channel as yours, your handset can sometimes pick up the neighbour's signals and ring. It doesn't intercept the call — when you answer you only hear a dial tone — but it is annoying. If you notice this

SUPERFONE CT-1000AUS

Price: \$329/\$449

Good points

- Equal top scorer for performance — works very well at a range of 200 metres.
- Remote charging possible.
- Can 'lock' phone, by switching off dialling facility.
- Has many features.

Bad points

- Can't replace battery yourself.
- Handset a bit uncomfortable to hold.
- Base can't be mounted on wall.



VOCA CT3800 AUS



CALLMASTER CT-880AUS

VOCA CT3800 AUS

Price: \$195/\$249

Good points

- Among the top scorers for performance — works very well at a range of 200 metres.

Bad points

- Handset a bit uncomfortable to hold.



VOCA CT7800 AUS

VOCA CT7800 AUS

Price: \$299/\$349

Good points

- Among the best for performance.

Bad points

- Handset a bit uncomfortable to hold, and generally less convenient.



SHIMASU F-7002-AUS

PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS

Price: \$219/\$269

Good score for performance, with no outstanding points.

CALLMASTER CT-880AUS

Price: \$199/\$299

Good score for performance, but handset uncomfortable to hold.



PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS

SHIMASU F-7002-AUS

Price: \$150

Good score for performance, with no outstanding points.

CORDLESS PHONES

1

2

Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/distributor	Origin	Warranty (months)	Price (\$)*	Replacement battery price (\$)	User can replace batteries	Two-w page
PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS	Panasonic	Japan	12	345/449	28	✓	✓
PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS	Panasonic	Japan	12	229/319	28	✓	✓
SHIMASU F-7220-AUS	Dick Smith Electronics	Thailand	12	179/200	30	✓	✓
SHIMASU F-7102-AUS	Dick Smith Electronics	Thailand	12	180	30	✓	✓
SUPERPHONE CT-1000AUS	Telephone Systems	Japan	3	329/449	30		✓
VOCA CT3800 AUS	Voca Communications	China	12	195/249	35	✓	✓
VOCA CT7800 AUS	Voca Communications	Japan	12	299/349	35	✓	✓
PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS	Panasonic	Japan	12	219/269	28	✓	✓
CALLMASTER CT-880AUS	Access Communications	Hong Kong	12	199/299	25	✓	✓
SHIMASU F-7002-AUS	Dick Smith Electronics	Thailand	12	150	30	✓	
COMPUTEC MP200-AUS	Australian Telephone Distributors	Hong Kong	12 (A)	88/99	25		
CALLMASTER CT-830AUS	Access Communications	Japan	12	249/349	25		✓
NOT RECOMMENDED							
ATD MP350AUS	Australian Telephone Distributors	Hong Kong	12 (A)	163/200	30	✓	

* Prices are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in September 1992. (A) Replacement warranty.

problem shortly after you buy the phone, try taking yours back to the shop and swapping it for one programmed to a different channel. Alternatively, try shortening the aerial on your cordless phone or, while you're in earshot of the ordinary phone, leaving it turned off until someone rings you.

■ Privacy can't be guaranteed. Someone using another cordless phone nearby or a radio frequency scanner could intercept the radio waves linking the base and handset of your phone, and be able to listen to your conversation.

HOW LONG BEFORE THE BATTERIES NEED REPLACING?

We didn't test battery life, but rechargeable batteries usually need replacing around once a year. The actual life you achieve will depend on how much you use the cordless phone, and whether you recharge and care for the batteries according to the manufacturer's instructions. (Some people believe rechargeable batteries should be allowed to go completely flat at least every now and then, and then be recharged completely, rather than always using part of the charge and topping it up. However, this is still an area of controversy, and we can't say for certain how much difference it makes.)

With most of the phones we tested, you can replace the batteries yourself. Three need to be taken to the manufacturer's service centre or agent to be replaced, which would be a decided nuisance (see the table for which ones).

ARE EXPENSIVE MODELS BETTER THAN CHEAP ONES?

We bought all models on the market at the time our testing began. (Unfortunately, the latest Telecom models were not available then.) They ranged in price from \$99 to \$369. The cheapest one we tested scored lowest for overall convenience and third lowest for performance. While the rest didn't show a consistent correlation between price and performance, the top two performers were toward the top of our price range and the two cheapest were near the bottom of the list.

The dearer ones also tend to have more features. All models we tested had some basic useful features, including a light or beeper to tell you the battery charge is getting low, a light to show when recharging is taking place and a button which will redial the last number dialled. There's a great variety of other features which some models had and others didn't; the ones we think are particularly useful are listed in the table and described in the table notes on the right.

WHAT OUR TEST FOUND

All the models we tested worked effectively. The top-rating PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS stands out from the rest because of its convenient pocket size, and because it is the only model which allows you to have a spare battery permanently on charge in the base so you're never caught out with a flat battery. It's also one of the dearest.

Those that scored lower for performance have a shorter operating range. All

worked well up to 80 metres from the base, and all except the bottom three in the table worked well up to 150 metres, which should be adequate for most people. If you want a cordless phone that works up to 200 metres from the base, the PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS, SUPERPHONE CT-1000AUS and VOCA CT3800 AUS performed very well for both voice clarity and background noise at this range.

The models also varied quite widely in their convenience scores. The main reasons the COMPUTEC and CALLMASTER CT-830 AUS scored so much lower in this area were that they were uncomfortable to hold, had to be taken to a service centre to replace the batteries, and had fewer features. The third-lowest overall scorer — the ATD MP350-AUS — isn't recommended at all. According to the instructions, if you leave the batteries recharging longer than 48 hours they could be damaged, and there's no warranty for them. See the profiles on pages 42 and 43 for more details about individual models.

WHAT TO BUY

Brand/model (in rank order)	Price (\$)*
PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS	345/449
PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS	229/319
SHIMASU F-7220-AUS	179/200
SHIMASU F-7102-AUS	180
SUPERPHONE CT-1000AUS	329/449
VOCA CT3800 AUS	195/249
VOCA CT7800 AUS	299/349
PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS	219/269
CALLMASTER CT-880AUS	199/299
SHIMASU F-7002-AUS	150

* Prices are indicative of the range found in nationwide checks in September 1992.

3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
room	Receive call at base	Handset volume control	Memory (no. stored)	Remote charging possible	Overall convenience (%)	Performance (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
✓	✓	✓	10		90	88	89	PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS
✓		✓	9		79	90	85	PANASONIC KX-T3826BA/AUS
✓		✓	10		80	89	85	SHIMASU F-7220-AUS
		✓	10		78	88	84	SHIMASU F-7102-AUS
✓			22	✓	69	90	82	SUPERFONE CT-1000AUS
			10		65	89	79	VOCA CT3800 AUS
✓		✓	20		71	85	79	VOCA CT7800 AUS
		✓			75	81	78	PANASONIC KX-T3806BA/AUS
✓	✓	✓		✓	74	78	76	CALLMASTER CT-880AUS
		✓			74	78	76	SHIMASU F-7002-AUS
					48	68	60	COMPUTEC MP200-AUS
✓		✓		✓	54	59	57	CALLMASTER CT-830AUS
								NOT RECOMMENDED
					61	62	61	ATD MP350AUS

COMPARABLE MODELS

The ATD 220AUS and ATD 250AUS are technically the same as the COMPUTEC MP200 AUS.

1 USER-REPLACEABLE BATTERIES

With most models, you can easily replace the batteries yourself. With those where you can't, you are either unable to open the sealed battery compartment, or need a soldering iron to remove the old batteries and connect the new ones. You would have to take these models to the manufacturer's service centre or agent to have the batteries replaced — something which may need to be done as frequently as once a year.

2 TWO-WAY PAGING

All the phones enable someone at the base to 'beep' the person with or near the handset. With those with two-way paging, the person with the handset can also signal the base.

3 INTERCOM

Some models with two-way paging also have an intercom feature which allows the base and the handset to talk to each other, like a walkie-talkie.

4 RECEIVE CALL AT BASE

This means someone near the base can also answer the phone. Those with this feature have a speaker in the base which you can switch on to converse with a caller. You can also have a three-way conversation with a caller and the person with the handset, like with an ordinary extension phone.

5 HANDSET VOLUME CONTROL

Means you can adjust the loudness of the

incoming call. This could be useful if it's a bad connection or you're hard of hearing.

6 MEMORY

With this feature you can program in phone numbers of people you call frequently; they are stored in memory and are dialled automatically at the touch of a couple of buttons. The number in this column is how many phone numbers can be programmed in.

7 REMOTE CHARGING

With most models, the handset has to be put in its cradle in the base to recharge the batteries. Only a few can be recharged away from the base using a separate charging unit.

8 OVERALL CONVENIENCE

When rating convenience we evaluated:

- Ease of use (which made up 50% of the overall convenience score).
- Instructions (25% of score).
- Features (25% of score).

Ease of use took into account how comfortable the phone was to hold and use, and how easy it was to dial, carry the handset on stand-by, recharge and change the batteries. Instructions were assessed to see if they were clearly worded and contained useful diagrams, safety warnings and information about connecting the phone to the line, troubleshooting and how to care for the phone and batteries. To rate features, each model was awarded points if it had specific features thought to be particularly useful (including those listed in the table).

9 PERFORMANCE

We tested performance by using the phones to make and receive calls to and from a conventional phone set up in one of our

laboratories. During testing, the base of each cordless phone was behind a double brick wall. The handset was then used at 80, 150 and 200 metres from the base to assess the quality of the reception at both ends. (Up to 80 metres is around the range needed within an average house and garden; you'd need more than that if you have a particularly large property or grounds.)

Each cordless phone was scored for voice clarity and level of background noise at each distance. These scores were weighted so that the score for 80 m was given most emphasis, then combined to give a final performance score. Within this final score, voice clarity was given the greatest weight, making up 70%.

10 OVERALL SCORE

Performance and convenience scores were combined to produce the overall score. Performance was given slightly more emphasis, contributing 60% of the final score.

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

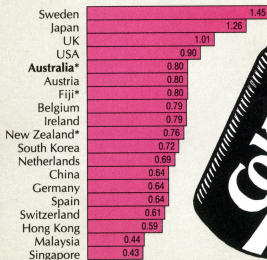
None of the phones was considered unsuitable for people with disabilities. If you have manual dexterity problems, such as arthritis in the hands, the three PANASONIC models would be best choice — they are lighter and easier to use than the others. The three SHIMASU models are a bit heavier, but would be the next best. The CALLMASTERS and the COMPUTEC are the most uncomfortable to hold. Changing the batteries would be difficult for all models except the PANASONIC KX-T3000BA/AUS.



MUNCHIES

COCA COLA

330 mL can of Coca Cola

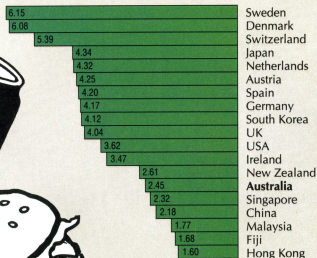


* 375 mL can



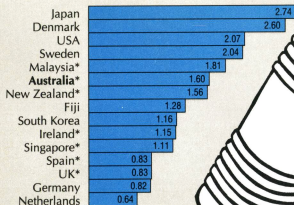
BIG MAC

McDonalds Big Mac

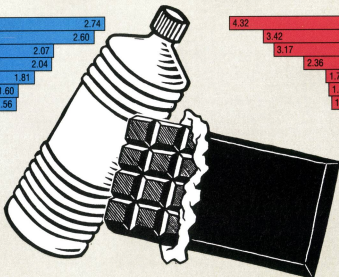


MINERAL WATER

1 litre still mineral water (Evian where available)

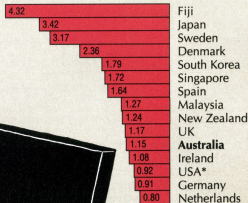


* 1 litre size not available, calculated from 1.5 litre.



CHOCOLATE

100 g milk chocolate (Cadburys where available)



* 100 g size not available, calculated from 150 g.

All prices are in Australian dollars (rounded to the nearest cent), based on exchange rates quoted in the *Australian Financial Review*, October 27, 1992.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Inflation and interest rates

This quiz asks questions designed to make you stop and think when looking at quoted investment returns, or interest rates on borrowing.

1 If you borrow \$20 000 to buy a car, and pay interest at 16%, how much will your monthly payment be to pay off the loan in four years?

- A) \$636
- B) \$556
- C) \$396

2 If the interest rate on your car loan climbs to 25%, how much will your monthly payments be?

- A) \$786
- B) \$636
- C) \$556

3 How much will a \$100 000, 15-year mortgage cost during the first year if you take out a mortgage with a fixed rate of 8.25% for the first year?

- A) \$14 916 (\$1243 a month)
- B) \$12 576 (\$1048 a month)
- C) \$11 436 (\$953 a month)

4 If, after the first year (in which the rate is capped), the interest rate on a \$100 000, 15-year mortgage rises and you now pay 12%, what will the payments be?

- A) \$16 027 (\$1336 a month)
- B) \$14 916 (\$1243 a month)
- C) \$13 799 (\$1150 a month)

5 If you borrow \$50 on Monday morning and pay back \$55 on Friday morning, what interest rate would you have paid for the loan?

- A) More than 500 000%
- B) 5000%
- C) 10%

ANSWERS

1. B) \$556. You'd pay back a total of \$26 685 over the four years. If you wanted to spread the cost over longer and pay it back over seven years you'd hand over more than \$32 000 to the lender.

2. B) \$636. When you take out a loan it's important to check what happens to the interest rate you're charged if general interest rates change.

3. C) \$11 436 a year (\$953 a month). If there wasn't a capped rate of 8.25% (and you paid 10% instead) you'd have \$1145 more to pay in the first year. But when looking at mortgages with capped rates, check the charges too.

4. C) \$13 799 a year (\$1150 a month). If interest rates go up you might want to lengthen the term of your mortgage. In this case paying off the loan over 25 years instead of 15 would cut your monthly payments to \$979 — though you'd pay more over the full term of the mortgage.

5. A) If you work out the compound interest rate over a whole year it comes to an annual rate of 598 425% (based on paying \$5 interest on a borrowing of \$50 for a total of four days). This huge rate may seem strange — after all it's only \$5 interest. But if you had borrowed the \$55 for a further four days the amount now owing would be \$60.50. Repeating this process every four days would mean that \$50 borrowed for a full year would require an interest payment of \$299 213.



RECALLS AND BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list please let us know.

Kambrook has recalled **SPEEDIE SP4** and **PRICE BRAND SP4BR FOUR-OUT-LET POWERBOARDS** as some are wired incorrectly and are unsafe to use. The powerboards in question have rounded ends; the plug top and cord are branded 'TRIACE'. Call Kambrook 550 9355 in Melbourne, or 008 800 634 elsewhere.

Samsung has recalled **SAMSUNG CB515F** and **CB515Z 48 CM COLOUR TELEVISIONS** as a faulty solder joint on a printed circuit board may lead to burning or fire. Do not use the television. Call Samsung with the serial number of your television to find out whether your set is affected by this recall: 008 803 444.

ARMSTRONG AXLE STANDS, BOTTLE JACKS and **20-TONNE GARAGE JACKS** have been withdrawn from sale as they do not meet Australian Standards fully. Affected models are:

- Axle stands: 2T capacity pin type, model AW864, and 2T capacity screw type, model AW 865, with batch numbers 1 to 4300. These may also have been sold branded **NANSEN**. 2T capacity ratchet type, model M863, with batch numbers beginning RT or FG (purchased since January 1989). 5.5T ratchet type, model M866 (purchased since January 1990).
 - Blue-color trucker series bottle jacks: all 8T, 12T, 15T capacities, models TS56-8, TS56-12 and TS56-15.
 - 20-tonne garage jacks, model M866.
- Call Armstrong York on (02) 790 2603.

Woolworths has recalled **PLASTI LOONS BALLOON BLOWING TOY** (item no. 01357) as it may present a toxic hazard to the user. Return to Woolworths Variety, Supermarket or Crazy Prices store for refund.

Mavvic has recalled **UNIVERSAL BRAND 5 ADAPTION PLUG KIT MODEL MW9** as live pins can be touched, resulting in electric shock. Return for refund to Mavvic; (02) 669 3799.

K mart has recalled **4.5 KG JACKEROO GAS CYLINDERS** made in Israel, serial number range 0001 to 1361 (sold in NSW only) as a faulty seal between the valve and the neck of the gas bottle may allow gas to escape. Take to a gas cylinder testing station as soon as possible. Details of nearest centre available by phoning (02) 644 8349. K mart will reimburse cost of testing and repair.

Rheem has recalled **PLASTIC LIDS FOR RHEEM 10 KG BUCKETS OF POOL CHLORINE** as the lid may become brittle and crack if pressure is applied. This could allow other liquid etc to come in contact with the pool chlorine, which could result in fumes. Test lid by pressing firmly in centre. If it cracks, contact Rheem for a replacement lid.

Burrad has notified consumers that **BURRAD HYDROCHLORIC ACID PLASTIC BOTTLES** — 500 mL, 1L and 2L amber PETE — have been found to be unsuitable for storage of hydrochloric acid. In time they become brittle and semi-opaque and may crumble or split. Contact your supplier for instructions on how to keep or dispose of acid safely.

Bovell's Bakery has recalled **BOVELL'S MEAT PIES** (six-pack, use-by date August 18, 1992), as a metal fragment was found in one. Contact Bovell's for replacement, on (09) 300 2900.

The Boots Company has recalled **COUMADIN 7.5 MG TABLETS (PACK SIZE 50)**, batch 172KK, expiry date December 1996, as some of these yellow tablets may be incorrectly stamped 2½ instead of 7½. Return to pharmacy for replacement.

Electrex has recalled **SHELL ELECTRIC SMC 16" OSCILLATING PEDESTAL FAN** model SE16, AC 240V, 50 Hz, 0.19 A, registration number Q91104 or Q91150 (pictured) as it may be fitted with an incorrect terminal block and therefore may be a fire hazard. Call Electrex to arrange free service: (02) 565 1311 or (07) 260 6477.



PLEASE SEND US

- change of address ■ renewal
- subscription inquiries

Just write to:

The Subscription Section
Australian Consumers' Association
 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.
 or phone (02) 558 8088

TWELVE MONTH INDEX

JANUARY — DECEMBER 1992

(T) test

(D) includes assessment of suitability for those with disabilities

(F) feature — general advice

(M) feature — includes market information

(S) subscriber survey or user trial

(C) Consumer in law

(L) letter

(U) update of previous report

* additions or corrections to reports

Abattoirs	Jun(F),Sep(L)	Exterior house paint	Feb(T)	Meat production	Jun(F),Sep(L)
Air conditioners, reverse-cycle	Nov(T,D)	Fans, Mistral	Apr(C)	Microwave ovens, small	Jun(T,D),Aug*
Allergies	Nov(F)	Fax machines	Jan(T)	Mistral fans	Apr(C)
Aluminium in the diet	Jan(F),Apr*	Food		Mod-n-Aire gas heater	Jul(F)
Annuities	Mar(F)	canned, drained weight	Aug(T)	Money for travelling	May(F)
Answering machines	Oct(T)	cholesterol and oat bran	Jun(F)	National and 'generic' brands	Aug(F)
Anti-discrimination legislation	Jan(C)	coffee bags	Oct(S)	Network selling	Jul(F)
Arthritis	Oct(F)	fish fingers and portions	Feb(T),May(L)	Notebook computers	Dec(T)
Audio equipment		frozen desserts	Dec(T)	Oat bran	Jun(F)
buying hifi components	Apr(F)	irradiation of	Aug(F)	Orbital sanders	Jun(T)
car radio/cassette players	Jun(T)	labelling	Mar(F)	Ozone layer	Aug(F)
Bank accounts	Sep(M),Nov*	soy drinks	Apr(T)	Packaging, 'green'	Jun(F)
Bicycle helmets	Oct(T)	sugar in	Apr(F)	Paint, exterior house	Feb(T)
Blenders, handheld	Nov(T,D)	yoghurt	Nov(T,F)	Pay TV	Oct(F)
Bottled water*	Jan(T),Feb*	Frypans, electric	Aug(T,F)	Pest inspections	May(F),Jul(L)
Bunk beds	Jan(F)	Funerals, organising	Sep(F)	Phone advice, legal	Nov(C)
Business insolvency	Mar(C)	Gas heater, Mod-n-Aire	Jul(F)	Phones	
Buying guide, annual	Dec	Gas heaters, unflued	Apr(T,D)	cellular	Jul(T,D),Oct(L)
Carpets		'Generic' and national brands	Aug(F)	cordless	Dec(T,D)
spot cleaners for	Sep(T)	Goods and services tax	Jul(F),Oct(L)	Playground equipment	Feb(F)
stain-resistance treatments	Nov(T)	Greenhouse effect	Oct(F)	Pool fences	Dec(F)
Cars		Handheld blenders	Nov(T,D)	Reclaiming stolen property	Sep(C)
insurance	Feb(M),Dec(S)	Health insurance	Nov(M)	Refrigerators	
radio/cassette players	Jun(T)	Heat guns	Feb(T,D)	200-299 litre	Mar(T),May(L)
reliability survey	Aug(S)	Heaters, gas unflued	Apr(T,D)	300-350 litre	Sep(T,D)
steering wheel locks	May(T,D)	Helmets, bicycle	Oct(T)	Reliability survey, cars	Aug(S)
Cellular phones	Jul(T,D),Oct(L)	Hifi, buying components	Apr(F)	Retirement villages	May(F)
Chemicals in the home	Sep(F)	Home, chemicals in the	Sep(F)	Reverse-cycle air conditioners	Nov(T,D)
Cholesterol and oat bran	Jun(F)	Hormone replacement therapy	May(F)	Safety switches	Jul(F)
Clothes dryers	Mar(T,D)	Household energy use	May(F)	Sanders, orbital	Jun(T)
Coffee bags	Oct(S)	Index, three-year	Jun	Secateurs	Oct(S)
Complaints against lawyers	Jun(C)	In-line skates	Dec(T)	Skates, in-line	Dec(T)
Computers, notebook	Dec(T)	Insolvency, business	Mar(C)	Sleeping pills	Apr(F)
Cooktops, choosing	Jan(M)	Insurance		Smoke detectors	Feb(M)
Cordless drills	Jan(T,D),Jul(L)	agents and brokers	Feb(F),May(L),Jun(L)	Soy drinks	Apr(T)
Cordless phones	Dec(T,D)	car	Feb(M),Dec(S)	Spot carpet cleaners	Sep(T)
Desserts, frozen	Dec(T)	health	Nov(M)	Standards Australia	Dec(F)
Do-it-yourself and the law	May(C)	Irons	Mar(T,D)	Steering wheel locks	May(T,D)
Drained weight of canned food	Aug(T)	Irradiation of food	Aug(F)	Stolen property, reclaiming	Sep(C)
Drills, cordless	Jan(T,D),Jul(L)	Jargon, economic	Oct(F)	Sugar in food	Apr(F)
Economic jargon explained	Oct(F)	Lawnmowers, electric	Feb(T,D)	Supermarket survey	Jul(S)
Electric frypans	Aug(T)	Lawyers, complaints against	Jun(C)	Tampons	Apr(T)
Emergencies, home	Mar(F),Aug(L)	Legal advice, by phone	Nov(C)	Tax, goods and services	Jul(F),Oct(L)
Energy use in the home	May(F)	Lost wallet, what to do	Aug(C),Nov*	Travel money	May(F)
				TV, pay	Oct(F)
				TVs, medium-sized	Jul(T,D)
				Unit pricing	Sep(F)
				Vets' fees	Nov(F)
				Water, bottled	Jan(T),Feb*
				Wallet, if you lose	Aug(C),Nov*
				Yoghurt	Nov(T,F)